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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE

BY

A PLAIN WOMAN

A GOSSIP WITH NO PLOT IN PARTICULAR

A NEW EDITION

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MY TRIVIAL LIFE AND MISFORTUNE.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

My father died when I was only five years old. My dear mother never ceased to grieve for him with a regretful love. She hoped when I grew up I would be as good, and agreeable, and lively, and clever as he. My father had only one peculiarity which I do not think my mother wished me to inherit, as it seemed to have proved a trying one to her. My mother had a remarkable gift of prophecy, and her prophecies always came true. Now when any great social or political or religious event foretold by her happened, what used my father to do but forget her prophecy and his own flat contradiction as to the possibility and probability of the accomplished fact! My mother has told me he would even go so far as to declare he had never questioned the likelihood of the predicted event. Certainly in this respect my father was a most provoking husband.

My mother constantly entertained me with an account of her many fulfilled prophecies. She and her sister prophesied on all occasions; but while Aunt Jane gave forth high Tory, illiberal predictions, my mother's spirit foretold the triumph of liberty, equality, civilisation, and peace.

From the time of my father's death till the day my aunt married Uncle Sherbrook, Aunt Jane, the Proverbs of Solomon, and Dr MacShaw's Commentary lived in our house with my mother and me. I particularly disliked that Commentary. I seem to have hated it from infancy. I once fell into a sad scrape about it. I made a doll's pillow of a hymn-book and a bolster of the Commentary. Aunt Jane reproved me for

this disrespectful act with much severity. She ordered me to put the book away; so I threw the old *Commentary*—it was a very long-winded one—under the sofa. Aunt Jane desired me, under penalty of punishment, to give her Dr MacShaw's *Exposition of Holy Scripture*. My spirit rose; I hated obeying Aunt Jane—I refused. We had a battle, and it ended in my going to bed in dire disgrace; but the book remained under the sofa. I never again played with the blessed work, except one Sunday when, having broken my Noah's Ark, I propped it up with the *Commentary*. It was the only large book I could find in my hurry. While thus occupied, I happened to raise my eyes, and behold! there was Aunt Jane watching me. I jumped up and steeled my heart for a fight. But she did not scold me; she only looked and walked away. I then remembered Noah's Ark is a Sunday toy. I might have propped it up with a *prayer-book* had I wished.

My mother has often told me she was delighted when Aunt Jane married Uncle Sherbrook, for she had thought her sister would never find a man *sound* enough to marry, but would live on with us, and lead me kicking and crying in the way I should go—that way from which I might not afterwards depart. Aunt Jane was always quoting Solomon. Oh, how I detested Solomon in those days! I discovered the King of Judah and Israel had a great many wives, and I know my aunt thought it wrong to marry more than one person at a time. Aunt Jane had been quoting, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” So I said, “Aunt Jane, if you marry, how many husbands will you have?” “One, child!—one!” she cried, tartly. “Sophy, you had better learn your hymn; you did not know it yesterday.” “Oh, but, Aunt Jane, I want to ask you, if you were a man—a very grand man, and a very good man, a king with a gold crown—you would have a great many wives, would not you?” “If I had a great many wives, Sophy, I should be a very naughty man, and not a good man at all, and I should not go to heaven.” “Then,” said I, “Solomon was a very naughty man; and, Aunt Jane, you ought not to do what a naughty man tells you, or you won't go to heaven.” Aunt Jane was not great in argument; she invariably answered by reproving her adversary. “Learn your hymn this instant, child; do you hear? I hope you are not going to be disobedient. Do not oblige me to punish you; for, Sophy, you know how it pains me to do so.” Strange to say, Aunt Jane always imagined it hurt her feelings more to punish me than it hurt mine to be

punished. I learnt the hymn as a tribute of respect to a fallen enemy. I can perfectly recollect feeling I had gained a victory over Aunt Jane.

We had ten days' respite from the Proverbs of Solomon. I think Aunt Jane finds a difficulty in learning by heart, for she learns nothing new. She is like a barrel-organ: it must have been awkward to get the tunes inside her; but once there, the same tune plays on for ever. The wisdom of Solomon will stay in her till doomsday. The Proverbs were always enunciated with a seriousness admirably suited to Aunt Jane's long and infallible upper lip.

My aunt was generally spoken of as an estimable, sensible person. She imagined herself to despise the vanities of dress: all the same, when she bought a new gown, she told Madame Julie Browne to make it in the fashion. But a new style of hairdressing she looked upon as a thing savouring of mundane frivolity, and even slightly of French Popery. There was a certain awful air of Protestant propriety in the cork-screw ringlets at each side of her head, and in the little twist of hair behind without puff or padding. Being no longer young, Aunt Jane so far complied with the fashion of the day as to perch a tuft of black lace with falling lappets on the little top-knot. However, her portly figure, her strongly marked Roman nose, and infallible upper lip, counterbalanced the *unsound* look of these lappets. *Soundness* was and is an absorbing mania with this excellent woman. She was over forty before she met a man as fully convinced as herself of the eternal damnation of all Papists, Jews, Turks, Greeks, and infidels. To use her own words, she married "a truly Christian gentleman." Uncle Sherbrook was more *sound* than fascinating. In appearance he was a tall, clean-shaven, sallow-faced man, with a long narrow head, a high and very narrow forehead, and a long thin nose.

Aunt Jane was stout and my uncle thin, and yet I think they grew somewhat like each other, especially in severe infallibility of expression. You could not help envying this pair their strong convictions—they had no misgivings. I admired Uncle Sherbrook at a distance. I was afraid of him when I came too near. He was a man of honour—a gentleman. He had some prejudices; he was a Tory of the old school. He was a proud, a very proud man, and came of an old family. He had a taste for armorial bearings, and secretly thought an immensity of his own green bear. This peculiar-looking animal danced upon one toe on all the plates, dishes, knives, forks, spoons, and tea-cups at Sherbrook Hall. He was also to be seen capering

upon the dining-room chairs. Aunt Jane used to wonder if anybody had ever seen a real green bear. If such an animal had existed before the Flood, she thought it probable there would be some tradition to that effect scattered over the earth by the lost tribes of Israel. But, for my part, I never imagined the green bear to be a Jew. I thought it far more likely he was a bilious English beast. Knowing my uncle to be of an old family, and of an ancient, crusty temper, I fancied the bear might be his first British ancestor: the Druids may have preserved him in a vegetable acid, until, being rather sour by nature, he turned green. Uncle Sherbrook had also Scotch blood in his veins, for his mother was a Miss Stewart. I once asked my uncle if his mother belonged to the same family as Mary Queen of Scots. "The Stewarts," he replied, "were Lord High Stewards of Scotland from time immemorial. I believe the Stuarts are a younger branch."

Nothing enraged my dear mother more than Uncle Sherbrook's pretension to treat the Royal Stuarts as poor relations. "I hate the Scotch!" she would cry; "they think all the old families wore ragged petticoats!" When put out, my mother would not call the Scotchman's garb a kilt.

My mother had her own family pride, and it did not lie at the radical-equality-of-all-men side of her heart. My mother and Aunt Jane traced their descent from a certain Sire Denis, a Norman said to have held a high command in the rear-guard at Hastings, and surnamed from this circumstance *Denis de l'arrière garde*. One of Sire Denis's descendants, Geoffrey or Geoffroi de Rigarde, was our immediate progenitor. In the reign of Queen Anne a Rigardy married a Wrenstone, an heiress.

Sophia Rigardy-Wrenstone did not disgrace her ancient lineage when she married a Thursley—or Thorslea, as the name should really be written. The Thorsleas are in the Doomsday-Book: they were important Saxons before the Conquest, but not perhaps so important since. Mamma has often wished she could remember the meaning of *Thors* and *Lea* in Anglo-Saxon, for they do mean something. Papa told her what, and she forgets.

However much my uncle might hold forth in the domestic circle, he did not parade to the world the antiquity of the Stewarts and Sherbrooks. He and Aunt Jane were calmly convinced of their own importance, and were perfectly satisfied with the exalted position they imagined themselves to hold in society. Uncle Sherbrook left boasting to what he called "cer-

tain cotton-spinners who take the title of Esquire." He considered himself a real esquire, and would as willingly have excluded mock esquires from society as he would the unsound from heaven. I used to think, if Uncle Sherbrook were really infallible (at times I thought he was), mock esquires and unsound heretics would be seen some fine day walking off to the infernal regions arm in arm.

The green bear himself could not have been of a more singular sort of constitution than Uncle Sherbrook; for my uncle had a striking peculiarity—he was never cross, though often bilious. When staying with us, I used constantly to think him decidedly out of temper; but Aunt Jane always said it was London disagreed with "dear Edward's liver." My aunt considers the liver to be a sort of internal Jesuit—the unseen author of all evil. She tells me her husband's constitution was nearly ruined when she married him, but that "under Providence" she became the means of restoring his health by a course of the water-cure. During the honeymoon, Aunt Jane discovered Uncle Sherbrook had been poisoned by the old system—the doctors had mistaken his case; so the bride declared the bridegroom's liver to be out of order, and from that day my uncle had a liver complaint.

My aunt is as infallible a doctor as a divine. She may truly be said to have two religions—sound Protestantism and the water-cure; the one for the heart, the other for the liver. There was yet a third faith which had to be held by whomsoever would be saved at Sherbrook Hall, and the faith was this—that he believe in the piety and morality of an eight-o'clock breakfast. My mother and I never embraced this faith, but it was a piece of sound doctrine enforced upon us even in our own house by the Sherbrooks. Mamma and I lived together after an easy-going fashion which scandalised my uncle and aunt. Their arrival in Montagu Square was like Luther's in Rome—they saw there a she-dragon sadly wanting reformation. Poor little dragon that I am! Words in season—ay, and out of season—never ceased trying my patience. The Sherbrooks reproved me, and they reproved mamma about me. They were shocked at my education. My mother liked to have me always with her as my companion, and in truth my youth was not fretted by much study. Yet it was the little I knew, and not my ignorance, which grieved my uncle and aunt, for had I not learnt that little from that dear old heretic Monsieur Tolain? Uncle Sherbrook had learnt French from an Englishman and a Protestant, but it so happened that mamma did not admire her brother-in-law's accent. As to Aunt Jane, she was a person

into whom neither a French accent nor an evil spirit could possibly enter. She knew a pious, well-informed Christian lady, of a certain age, eminently suited to undertake a difficult education like dear Sophy's—an education requiring much firmness and sound Church of England principles.

Mamma and I loved our little *tête-à-têtes*, and we hated the idea of a third person, pious, well-informed, and of a certain age. A resident governess's constant nagging would have killed me—as if Aunt Jane were not enough for any one's temper! It is true the governess might perhaps have killed a more accomplished young lady than the now living Sophy, for I am not accomplished. I cannot do fancy-work: I hate it! I cannot sing. As to music, I have no talent for it; or rather, yes, I have: I have talent enough to know that I have none! I began the German grammar twice, and stuck at the definite article. Of Italian, I know enough to guess the meaning of an opera: "Amor, cuor, occhi d' angiol, divina stel che sta nel ciel, perfida diva," are familiar to me; and when I hear the cry, "Il vecchio genitor!" I expect to see a cruel-hearted parent with a bass voice. The little I do know, I picked up from my French master, Monsieur Tolain, for I declare he had quite a genius for teaching agreeably. Though he scolded me, he never bored me, so I liked him. He was really a man of talent. For my part, I shall ever remember him with affection and gratitude, and I said so to Aunt Jane one day when we were talking over old times. Much shocked, she remarked that Jesuits were insinuating, and she told me a story taken from the 'Record,' of a Jesuit who entered an English family as the young ladies' Protestant governess. The girls never suspected their instructress was not a lady of the soundest Church of England principles, though they remarked she always sat with her back to the light, doubtless on account of her moustache and whiskers. I hoped that pious person of the Church of England principles about whom Aunt Jane used to bother my dear mother, might grow a moustache and turn out a Jesuit in disguise. But I did not say so; I only said, "My dear aunt, Monsieur Tolain is himself; believe me, he is nobody else in disguise."

"You know my opinion on this subject, Sophy, and your poor dear mother knew my opinion, but she would never take your uncle's or my advice. Had she done so, I will say you might have been very different from what you are. But, Sophy, I shall not argue any more. You may argue if you please."

My aunt evidently imagined she was arguing, for she got

quite red, shook her curls, and became personal in her remarks. "Sophy, I do not find you have so much spare affection and gratitude that you need waste them about the world on people who are not relations, and for whom you certainly would not go into mourning if they died, and with whom while alive you were always quarrelling."

"I often like the people with whom I quarrel, Aunt Jane. Monsieur Tolain is one of my silvered pills."

"Silvered pills! What on earth do you mean by silvered pills, Sophia?"

"I will tell you, Aunt Jane," said I. "Now that I am no longer young, I begin to reflect, and I have made a little corner in my heart where I keep certain old friends, like silvered pills in a little round pill-box. These are friends of my childhood and youth. I may have quarrelled with them as I used in old times."

Here Aunt Jane sighed deeply.

"They may have scolded me, and at first I may have disliked the pill, and may even have found it hard to swallow. But when once taken, I keep the silvered pill safe in this corner of my heart, and no one can take it from me."

"Sophy," asked my aunt, "am I a silvered pill?"

"To tell you the truth, Aunt Jane," I replied, "I never quite know if I have swallowed you or not."

"Perhaps, Sophia," said my aunt, severely — "perhaps, Sophia, you would call me a black dose."

"Well, perhaps I should, Aunt Jane," answered I, for the fun of it, "if you were not on the water-cure."

"Sophia," said my aunt, "your similes are not refined." And she sighed and shook her head, and seemed to imagine I was still arguing.

Certainly Aunt Jane's only sister's only child was a thorn in the flesh to her,—a stumbling-block to her soul; for she undoubtedly felt (I can't tell why) that her responsibility on my account was great both towards God and man, and she somehow managed to think Uncle Sherbrook would also have to answer for me not only in this life, but in the next. Under these circumstances of terrible responsibility, it was perhaps natural that my aunt should object to everything I did or learnt if she and Uncle Sherbrook had not previously been taken into solemn consultation on the subject. It was natural perhaps, but decidedly a nuisance, as Aunt Jane would object to all sorts of little things it never entered our head to consult her about. Thus she made a great fuss once about a very small matter. I

had merely taken a few painting lessons without her previous sanction and advice. So she objected to my learning drawing, and apparently for no reason except that "your uncle and I were not consulted on this subject, for your mother never takes our advice." She prophesied that painting would disagree with my liver. It did nothing of the kind; so she discovered that two of the nodules in my spine just beneath my shoulders were crooked. In all her letters she inquired for poor dear Sophy's crooked back, or else she hoped (*D.V.*) poor dear Sophy's spine was no worse; and when my mother in answer told her she had consulted a surgeon, and felt sure dear Jane would be delighted to hear that Sophy's spine was perfectly straight, my aunt wrote back—

"I am truly thankful and I heartily rejoice that under Providence the surgeon does not take a desponding view of poor dear Sophy's case—(*D.G.*) Nevertheless my dear Sophia, I think it my duty to impress upon you my firm conviction that there are two nodules in Sophy's spine which have been injured by an injudicious (and perfectly unnecessary) application on her part to her pencil and still worse to her brush for I well know what sad effects oil-painting has not only on the liver, but also on the back and if you will not take Edward's and my advice on this subject and insist upon our dear Sophy's giving up drawing and painting perhaps you will profit by my experience and use as a matter of precaution if not of cure, a cold-water compress which may be fastened over the affected nodules across the back so as to intersect the spine latitudinally at right angles and which may be worn during the day and also at night for I entertain sanguine hopes that the cold compress (*if persevered in*) will (*D.V.*) have the effect of permanently strengthening poor dear Sophy's weakened spine. Can you give Edward and me a bed on the 29th? for Mr Jones is in London at present and Edward is going up to town on that day to consult him about that right-of-way which you no doubt remember has been a subject of litigation between Edward and the village for the last ten years, and I hope to accompany him (*D.V.*), and with my own hands I hope to fasten the cold compress across poor dear Sophy's back."

Aunt Jane did come, and she did fasten the wet bandage latitudinally at right angles across my affected nodules. When she was leaving us next day, she told us with a deep sigh that she would write and announce her safe arrival at Sherbrook

Hall, "if indeed, Sophia, it pleases the Lord that I should arrive there safely." Aunt Jane always spoke of her safe arrival anywhere as doubtful, and she seemed to take a kind of spiritual, tenderly sorrowful pleasure in thus sighing out her possible destruction: not that she was at all a courageous woman, or one you would like to be with in any sort of danger or accident. It was some days before we heard from her, but this was her letter when it did come:—

"MY DEAR SOPHIA,—You would have heard from me sooner had I not been completely invalided and for one morning indeed, confined to my room by a sharp attack of catarrh and rheumatism for I fear that this mortal coil is wearing away and I pray that He will think fit to take me from this world of sin in His own good time. I applied the cold compress to my throat and also to my right knee (which was somewhat affected) and I am thankful to say (*D.G.*) that I received much benefit from these applications. I begged Edward to write and tell you of my illness but he said he could not find time to do so and indeed he himself was not very well having caught a slight chill on the liver but I am thankful to say he is now much better (*D.G.*), and he hopes to be in town (*D.V.*) on the 4th instant for the day and he will then call in Montagu Square at luncheon-time when he will leave with you a parcel directed to Madame Julie Browne. It is a new black silk with yellow stripes which I should like Madame Julie to have ready-made for me on my arrival in town. The stripes are perpendicular and I want to know should you advise me to have the flounces placed at regular intervals up the front of the skirt? If you do thus advise me, I think each flounce should be cut so as to have one yellow stripe running horizontally across the petticoat because I shall require the dress for rather smart occasions and I think this arrangement will look newer and more fashionable than a costume composed of merely straight stripes. I hope poor dear Sophy's spine is better. And now, with my best love to her and my blessing for you both, believe me, dear Sophia, to be your fondly attached sister,

"JANE SELINA HARRIET BARBARA SHERBROOK."

The day after this letter arrived, just ten minutes before post-time, mamma exclaimed, "What will become of us? I have never written to Jane. My darling child, I implore you, scatter off a line any way. Say I have a headache, inquire for the rheumatism, and tell your aunt I think her

too stout for the flounces and horizontal stripes. She will make an irregular zebra of herself with her stripes going in all directions."

I snatched up my pen and scribbled :—

"How is my poor Aunt Jane's rheumatic and mortal coil ? I don't think it is wearing away just yet, but the weather is damp and mortal coils are apt to get a chill. Mamma's coil has a headache, mine a spine, and Uncle Sherbrook's a liver ; still we all intend to live a little longer. I do hope, my dear Aunt Jane, that your knee will walk for many years through this vale of tears. Recollect you must wear out the yellow stripes in this wicked world, at least the perpendicular ones. You may keep the horizontal for a future state. Mamma says your stripes must all go in one direction or you will be an irregular zebra. She objects to your flouncing up the front of your mortal coil ; she thinks the coil too stout. The post is off, so I have no time to give you my blessing.—Ever SOPHY."

Within twenty-four hours I received a lengthy despatch from Aunt Jane saying she and my uncle were deeply shocked and grieved by my strange and blasphemous letter, and that as she was my mother's only sister, she thought it her duty to reprove me severely for the light manner in which I made use of Scriptural language. She moreover said that the decay of this mortal coil was an awful truth, and that if I did not amend my thoughts and ways and words, I should repent of my sins when it was too late. "Now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation." She and my uncle therefore earnestly hoped I would go down on my knees in my own closet and ask forgiveness for my sins. With prayers for my sincere repentance and for my eternal salvation, in which my uncle joined, Aunt Jane ended by begging me to believe her my fondly attached aunt,

JANE SELINA HARRIET BARBARA SHERBROOK.

The "Jane Selina Harriet Barbara" looked as if my aunt were signing a catechism, not a sermon. What is your name ? Jane Selina Harriet Barbara. How Aunt Jane must have delighted in her youth in getting the full amount of baptismal regeneration due to all those names ! During the days of torment when I had to repeat the Church Catechism to Aunt Jane, she insisted I should call myself Sophia Joanna Selina. Being generally mere Sophy, I felt convinced my godfathers and godmothers in my baptism had baptised somebody else.

Beneath the “Jane Selina Harriet Barbara Sherbrook” was a postscript to this effect: “Your uncle and I are completely at a loss to understand what you can mean by the expression ‘*she objects to your flouncing up the front of your mortal coil; she thinks the coil too stout.*’ However, you need not explain your meaning, for I regret to say your uncle and I are convinced the interpretation would be as unladylike, unchristian, and blasphemous as the language undoubtedly is.” This little amen was signed “J. S. H. B. S.”

I am changed since the days I loved skirmishing with Aunt Jane. I am much more careful now how I write than I was then; for with age I have gained sense, and I have discovered that to find one’s flippant ideas ready-made on the tip of a quill, if a delightful, is a dangerous habit. When there is not a curb, my pen runs away with me. I scribble a letter, I post it, and then I think, “Good heavens! what have I said?” or rather, “What have not I said?” Nowadays I no longer write as I think, but I think how I shall write. It is the safer plan. Yet on one point my spirit still rebels against the canons of orthodox soundness. I cannot *D.G.* and *D.V.*, and I will not! I hate this cant! *D.V.-ing* is an easy way of appearing religious. It is convenient, and but little trouble to concentrate one’s piety in a *D.* and a *V.* But if our feelings should move us to pray, why not pray naturally and in our own language? Why not say “please God” or “thank God”? If the desire be in our heart, it is worthy of rational expression; and if it be not, surely the Almighty is not flattered by an empty compliment. Hearing Aunt Jane animadvert one day on the scapulæ worn by monks and nuns, I said to her, “Aunt Jane, you do not wear reliques; but have not you yourself a little charm against the Evil One?”

“Sophy, are you mad?”

“The charm is not hung round your neck, Aunt Jane; it lies in your inkstand. What else but charms are your *D.V.’s* and your *D.G.’s*? They cannot be prayers, my dear; for surely you are not a Papist, so you would not pray in Latin.”

Aunt Jane, with a dignity quite sublime, declined to argue.

As the year wore on, and the weather became cold, I found the latitudinal cold compress extremely chilly.

“Could we not invent some warmer way of straightening my nodules?” cried I. “Shall I take dancing lessons, mamma? I prefer *chassées croisées* to wet bandages.” So we sent for Monsieur Louis Pépinet, the ex-ballet master, who at that time taught Portman Square, Bryanston Square, Montagu Square, and the neighbourhood, to hold up their head and keep their

ceinture en arrière. If my poor dear Monsieur Tolain was a stumbling-block to the Sherbrooks, what then was Monsieur Pépinet ? A ballet-dancer ! Beelzebub ! Aunt Jane sent me a tract entitled, "Captain Apollyon ; or, Dancing Downwards," hoping it would warn me of my imminent danger ; but I never read it. I really could not bring myself to read it, for I had had such a sickening of tracts in my short life that I positively hated the very sight of them.

One Christmas, many years ago, Aunt Jane gave me a dozen tracts. They were illustrated by coarse woodcuts representing half-naked negroes whipped by white men in striped trousers and broad-brimmed hats ; Hindoos bowing down to idols who had innumerable arms and hands, while lions and tigers prowled in the distance : or else they depicted scenes nearer home,—good little Tommy dying of consumption ; the pious British workman reading out of a huge book on which the words HOLY BIBLE were inscribed in capital letters—a frowning man in a frock-coat entering by the kitchen-door. When I now see a woodcut of the sort, I perceive at a glance that the rich ungodly man in the frock-coat will be converted by the mere sight of the Christian British workman. I know he will take a sermon in exchange for his rent. But in old times my experience of tracts was not what it is now, and I promised myself delightful stories connected with the pictures. The whipped negroes particularly interested my childish imagination. I cannot describe my anger when I found the blacks whipped to death in a page, and then a dozen pages of pious reflections, ending with a prayer and a hymn, which the "little Christian reader was affectionately entreated to commit to memory." I read with pleasure how little black Sambo stole the jam before he knew the Church Catechism (he never did so afterwards) ; I was interested in obstinate Jackey, who refused to honour his parents by learning a hymn on his birthday. I admired spirited Jackey, and took great delight in reading about a certain Miss Fanny who coveted her neighbour's doll. I liked Sambo, Jackey, and Fanny when naughty, but I hated them when good ; so when I came to the improving part of these moral tales, I would say to myself, "Sophy, skip the sermon." Goody books bore me to death ! I never shall forget my enchantment at the first novel I read. It was the cause of my making a great discovery. I was actually sixteen years of age when for the first time in my life I read a real novel. I borrowed it from my mother's maid, for Aunt Jane would not allow a novel to enter our house through the front door. By a real

novel I mean a love-story in which there is no instructive padding. The book was written by "Howard de Vere." I naturally imagined the author to be a man, but I have since heard "Howard de Vere" is a Miss Sarah Anne Jones. Every one in the novel was of surpassing beauty, even the wicked baronet, though he was a horrid man, and had a shocking and most peculiar trick of muttering blasphemous oaths through his clenched teeth. It was only a hard-hearted duke and a cruel marquis who were ugly. Everybody fell in love at first sight with everybody else. The hero and heroine were soon engaged. They adored each other, but a series of the most unfortunate and incomprehensible misunderstandings arose between them. The Lady Ina imagined Viscount Martletower had spoken to and therefore loved a person he had never even seen, and the Viscount fancied the Lady Ina did not care for him; and so they went on till, the Viscount's brain fever clearing away all complications of jealousy in the middle of the second volume, they unfortunately married.

To marry in the second volume of a novel, I found, was to linger consumptively through the third. The Lady Ina's health was undermined by this foolish wedding—her beauty grew more and more dazzling, and her lungs more and more delicate, through many long, melancholy chapters. I was blind from crying, and was actually glad when the Lady Ina broke her final blood-vessel. There was a great deal of mortality in the book. A young earl, who had also married in the second volume, became quite lovely and then died! The weddings of three secondary couples could not raise my spirits. On the contrary, these discordant festivities jarred with my feelings. In the last chapter of her book, Howard de Vere pressed into the married state every human being she could lay hands on—even a widower and an old maid. Fortunately for my harrowed feelings, there was not a fourth volume to the novel, so the three brides and the three bridegrooms were left to recover in peace from the exhaustion attendant on the complications of courtship.

Notwithstanding the protracted agonies of one volume of mortal illness, this dear, delightful novel enchanted me. I had never before mixed in such dazzling society, or lived in such an atmosphere of burning love. I felt like a recruit under fire, and saw proposals, like bullets, flying around me. I moved in a new world. The illusion was complete.

So thoroughly had I identified myself with the lovely creatures in the novel, that I felt as a triumphant beauty might

feel. Even the way the Lady Ina used to dress her hair, as described by Howard de Vere, sounded both romantic and becoming: she wore this lustrous, shimmering crown of gold simply braided across her brow. I imagined braiding to mean plaiting; so I plaited all my hair into a pig-tail like a Chinaman's, and wound the plait round my head, bringing it down very near my forehead. I looked at myself in the glass; but somehow the hair simply braided across the brow did not suit me, so I unbraided it, still gazing at my own reflection—gazing, yet no longer seeing, for Howard de Vere's influence overshadowed me. With my elbows on the dressing-table, and my head leaning on my hands, I fell into a reverie, and sentiments worthy of a beautiful marchioness filled my mind. My imagination took flight and soared amongst the broken hearts of the highest aristocracy. I soon found myself receiving a proposal from a marquis. I refused to marry him on account of his shocking wickedness. I pictured to myself the beneficial effect this cruel disappointment might be supposed to have on the marquis's moral conduct. I, a nobody in particular, to refuse a marquis with £100,000 a-year! Surely such disinterested virtue would convert the noble sinner from the turf. The marquis wrote me a letter so touching that it brought tears to my eyes. But I remained firm. I could not help thinking, perhaps I might have consented to become a marchioness had I not felt a secret inclination towards an artistic, poetic young earl, like the earl who died in the second volume of the novel. My thoughts sped on: the earl in thrilling words asked me to . . . But alas for these splendid visions! I saw myself in the looking-glass. I opened my eyes; I saw and I understood. It flashed upon me like a revelation, for the first time in my life, that I was a plain woman.

And so I am. I cannot be called frightful, or even extremely ugly: I have a bridge to my nose, and my teeth do not stick out like tusks; there is no one thing radically wrong about my face. We feel with some people that if their mouth were smaller, their forehead less protruding, or their eyes larger, they would be good-looking; but I could suggest no one change which would render me attractive. I ought to be made all over again. My nose is perhaps my worst feature—it is too large and fat. Still Nature might give me a good nose, and that alone would not make me handsome. I am common-looking, with fat cheeks and a double chin. I am short, and I have a bad figure. My hair is of no particular colour, and it would be hard to say if my eyes are grey or green. I have positively no complexion.

I am not plain enough for my ugliness to be spoken of ; I am too plain to be remarked. I might slip through life and die unnoticed—I might say unseen, only I am too stout to be altogether invisible.

As I sat gazing at my own real self, I could not understand how my imagination could ever have led me dreaming so far away from likelihood and truth ; but as I wondered, I felt I had two natures within me, and the one discovered the other to be a fool.

CHAPTER II.

Aunt Jane prophesied as melancholy a future for her only brother's only son as ever she did for her only sister's only daughter. His very appearance shocked her : it was not that of a "truly Christian gentleman." Almost from childhood Denis wished to be a "swell," and he was a "swell" before he had quite left school. He has an easy, jaunty sort of manner, and there is a very perceptible touch of swagger about him. He is six-foot-one, and gives you the impression that he thinks himself a very handsome man ; and he is handsome. I once overheard a lady with whom he had flirted (as she thought, heartlessly) take him to pieces. She called his mouth an unsteady thing, which wanted a good firm chin to keep it quiet in its right place. She wondered his lips were not tired of lisping and smiling. This lady did not admire my cousin's nose ; she declared it was drawn down, and the nostrils distended by a conscious effort. She allowed that Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone's forehead might be called a white one ; she let him have lively, light-blue eyes, but she refused them much expression. From the way I heard this lady disparage Denis's good looks, I must say I wondered she had ever flirted with him. Yet even her disappointed feelings could not uncurl his fair hair or dull the glow of his bright complexion.

Long ago my cousin was particularly vain of a not very small foot or high instep : he used to wear very tight boots, and say they pressed on his instep. His hand, though white, is bigger than he might wish ; and he was always complaining that his gloves were a size too large. Denis lost his mother in early childhood, and became a complete orphan at the age of twelve. So, till he was twenty-one, the Chancellor managed his money

matters. This "old fool did not give a fellow enough to dress upon ;" therefore, when Denis came of age, he owed his tailor £2000. He was proud of this debt, and boasted of it to his merest acquaintance. "Confound that old fool of a lawyer ! he would cut a fellow down to one coat and a pair of bags ! Hanged impertinence ! when a fellow has the fortune of a gentleman !"

My cousin has about £5000 a-year, but he talks as if he had twenty at least, and keeps up the establishment of a man of large fortune without apparently being in debt. He certainly has, rent-free, a fine old country place, inherited through a long line of ancestors ; and this gives him a good position in his county. Aunt Jane cannot imagine how Denis keeps out of debt, though she is always trying to do so. Uncle Sherbrook knows to a penny what my cousin's fortune really is. My uncle and Denis are next-door neighbours in the country. There is only the little village of Harefield between their avenue gates.

As far as I look back across my early life, I can remember Denis being always with us—at first living under our roof, and then coming constantly to our house. We saw him when he ran up to town from Harrow on a holiday. Once or twice when he was ill my mother nursed him ; and when his teeth were drawn or stuffed, we consoled him after his visit to the dentist. He was easy to console, for he did not long remember pain, and I doubt if even pleasure made a lasting impression on his mind. My mother loved Denis as a woman will love a boy when she has no son of her own. She indulged and spoilt him exactly as she would have done her own son ; and she took his part valiantly with Aunt Jane, for Denis was a subject of prayer at Sherbrook Hall. My aunt would frequently feel called upon to speak seriously to Denis. She flattered herself she had great influence with young men.

I remember being once present when Aunt Jane was speaking a *word in season* to my cousin. "Denis," said she, solemnly and with a deep sigh,—"Denis, your uncle and I are much grieved by your levity and unprofitable conversation, but your soul may perhaps yet be saved from eternal damnation."

I cried out, "It is too late, Aunt Jane !"

"Yes, I am altogether a lost sheep !" exclaimed my cousin. Aunt Jane was too much shocked to speak.

"I heard you telling mamma the day before yesterday, Aunt Jane," I continued, half innocently, half maliciously, "that there was no hope whatever of Denis's eternal salvation. You said he was a child of Satan, and a frivolous vessel of wrath. I

particularly remember your calling him a frivolous vessel of wrath ; for I thought it must be such a funny kind of vessel."

"Well done, Aunt Jane!" exclaimed my cousin, with great glee. - "There is no one like a pious lady for damning a fellow. I am d——d ! There is an end of it ! It must be certain, for Aunt Jane is always in the right. I appeal to you, Sophy ; is our respected aunt ever in the wrong?"

"Never!"

By this time poor Aunt Jane had recovered the use of her tongue. She accused me of arguing. She was really angry, and she administered to me the reproof I deserved ; but unfortunately, when she had delivered herself of this word in season, Denis had slipped from the room.

The next time we met, my cousin called me an "awful brick." "I hope, Sophy, Aunt Jane was not more than an hour blowing you up for the good of your soul?"

I answered pettishly—"Oh, indeed, Denis, you ran away, and left my poor sinful soul to suffer for both of us. It is not fair to a miserable sinner like me."

My cousin remarked philosophically that women fought best with women. "But as I said before, Sophy, you are an awful brick ; so come and I will show you, as a reward for your pluck, the locket I bought for Julia."

Julia was sister to one of the "fellows" at Haine's. My cousin had been "cramming" six months for the army—ever since he left Harrow. He lived with us, but was supposed to "cram" all day long at Haine's. He managed, nevertheless, to appear in Rotten Row every day between twelve and two. Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook rightly thought this a shocking waste of precious time ; but mamma maintained that Denis having bought a horse, had better ride him.

"Sophy," said my cousin, taking the locket from its red-velvet case, "you know I lost on Sparrowhawk?"

"No, I did not know it, Denis ; besides, I thought you and Julia only bet gloves."

"At first we bet gloves—now we bet lockets. Do you suppose when a fellow is in love he sticks at gloves?"

I asked Denis if Julia always gained the bet ; and he answered, to my surprise, "Sophy, you are an idiot!"

The locket was of unburnished gold. It was as big as a watch, and there were three capital J's engraved upon it in blue enamel—one J was straight, the other two were turned topsy-turvy. I was loud in my admiration. "And how lovely Julia will look when she wears this locket!"

"Humph!" replied my cousin, with the air of a connoisseur; "yes, Julia is a fine girl. Magnificent seat on horseback!—a light hand!—a good deal of dash about her!—and, by Jove, a neat foot!" Denis kicked a piece of coal from the hearth into the fireplace. "A woman," said he, "is nothing without a foot."

The way my cousin would speak of this Julia always puzzled and dazzled me.

When the locket was given to Julia, I inquired how the young lady liked the present. Denis assured me she was greatly pleased with it. "But she says, Sophy, the ring at the top ought to have been a blue enamel, and not a gold one; so I have sent the thing back to the jeweller."

"I wonder Julia was so indelicate as to find fault with a present," said I.

My cousin laughed pityingly. "Sophy, you are a regular Miss Jenny! You know nothing of society!" This was true, and I felt humiliated.

About two months after Julia received the locket, I found my cousin sitting alone in the drawing-room by twilight. I asked whom he was thinking of, that he looked so melancholy? He sighed, "I am thinking, Sophy . . . Haw! . . . I am thinking of the person I love best in this world."

I whispered, "You are thinking of Julia. Oh, Denis, won't she marry you?"

My cousin jumped in his chair; he stamped impatiently. "Well, Sophy," he exclaimed, energetically, "I must say you are the greatest moke that ever lived! Do you suppose a fellow marries his first love?"

I gave no answer; I only blushed for my ignorance.

"Miss Julia has seen the last of me," said my cousin, severely. I asked, "Does not Julia love you any more?"

"By Jove, I should rather think she did!"

"Then it is you, Denis, who do not want to marry poor Julia?"

"Oh, she is a fine girl, but *passée*, decidedly *passée*! Twenty-five if she is a day!" he said, contemptuously; "and I find she has accepted gloves and lockets from half the fellows at Haine's."

"That was because Sparrowhawk won," said I; "you ought to blame the jockey and not poor Julia."

My cousin burst out laughing, and exclaimed,—"Sophy, there is no use in talking to you; you understand nothing. I was going to tell you a secret, but I won't."

I pressed him to tell me, for I dearly loved secrets in those days.

"Well, then, guess, Sophy. Of whom was I thinking?"

"Is the person dead?"

"Dead? Nonsense! but when a man thinks of the human being he loves best in the world, he does not giggle."

"Is it a gentleman?"

Denis seemed greatly amused at this idea. "By Jove," he said, "it is Uncle Sherbrook!"

"No, it is not. I see now it is a lady."

My cousin suggested Aunt Jane or the Catechism, for he felt sure the Catechism was of the female sex. At length he said I could never guess, "for how could you when you never saw her?" He then told me *her* was a certain Emily, "the most lovely girl that ever breathed. Beats Julia hollow." He had met this charming creature in the Row every day for the last week, her brother having introduced her to him just ten days ago. He felt himself to be hopelessly in love with her.

"Do fellows marry their second love?" I asked, most innocently; "or do they wait till the third?"

"By Jove, Sophy, you are silly! I shall never love any one on earth but Emily. I adore her. I intend to propose, and I hope the governor won't refuse."

My imagination was highly interested in the lovely Emily; and yet I did not like to inquire any more about her, fearing that instead of Emily there might be a Mary or a Fanny. The "governor" may have refused, for my cousin never spoke of Emily again: perhaps I had heard too much of Julia, or perhaps he had come to the age when a young man keeps his love affairs to himself.

When Denis conceived this passion for the charming Emily, he was on the verge of his examination. Shortly afterwards his name appeared 130th on the list for direct commissions.

The regiment to which he was gazetted was quartered for two years at Aldershot. When Uncle Sherbrook was with us, he used constantly to see Denis walking and driving about town, yet my cousin only came twice to our house. The first time we happened to be out, so did not see him; and the second we were at home, but he did not come in. He told John he could only leave his card, as he was on his way to the Great Western to catch the Windsor special train, for he was going to spend the Ascot week at Windsor. John told Snipkins (Snipkins told Aunt Jane) that from Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone's look and manner, he, John, judged Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone must be going to stay

with the Queen at Windsor Castle. I looked in Uncle Sherbrook's 'Morning Post,' and saw the Queen had gone to Osborne, so it must have been the Prince of Wales whom Denis honoured by his company.

We met my cousin the following week walking in Rotten Row, and his head was so completely turned that he did not even know us. Indeed for a moment I must allow I hardly recognised him. He was dressed remarkably—just beyond the height of the fashion. He wore his hat much cocked on one side; he held up a cigar between the first and second fingers of a pale-yellow glove, the little finger stuck out—it was the hand of an affected woman. Altogether my cousin had an affected and stiffened look about him which amazed me—it was so unnatural, so unlike his former self. I declare he looked like some disjointed doll: his legs might have belonged to any one, and he held his arms in a peculiar pointed-elbow fashion which shortened his coat-sleeves. It seemed as if he were particularly anxious the populace should remark his white shirt-cuffs, so perhaps he had a prince's plume engraved upon his studs.

At the end of the two years, Uncle Sherbrook heard Denis's regiment was ordered out to Canada. We did not see Denis before he started. My mother often said she was sure he had wished to bid us good-bye before he left, and that some accident only could have prevented him. My mother was right: Denis had wished to say good-bye, but could not quite manage it. We received a letter of apology from him. He had been staying up in town before he started, with Travis, Lord Furley's eldest son; but he and Travis had been so gay going about everywhere, that positively he had not had a moment to himself. My mother said it was just like dear Denis to think of writing such a thoughtful, affectionate letter.

CHAPTER III.

Time passed on. I was eighteen years of age, and the Sherbrooks were anxious I should be presented at Court, my uncle even more so than my aunt. He seemed to think my ancestors would have wished me to kiss the Queen's hand. All very fine of my ancestors; but if they intended me to cut a figure at Court, they should have entailed their fortune and not their nose.

upon me. As we were not in the Court circle, and had but little chance of being invited to Marlborough House or the Queen's concert at Buckingham Palace, mamma and I thought Court dresses a ridiculous expense. We did not tell this to the Sherbrooks, for fear they might imagine they were called upon to make us a present of our trains. Not, however, that there was much chance of their doing so. Except tracts, my uncle and aunt had never given me anything; yet they were very generous to the Blacks.

So it happened that important person Sophy Thursley did not make her *début* at Court, but "came out" at a ball given by her old friends the Clarckes. When I say old friends, I mean old London friends. Ever since I can remember, the Clarckes were on visiting terms with us. Sir Henry was a friend of my father. Each spring when they came up to town from their place in Nottinghamshire, Lady Clarcke called, and we called in return, and before leaving town she never failed to leave a P.P.C. One year we never met at all, for we were not at home when she called, and she was out when we called. Three or four times in my youth I was invited to take tea in the school-room with Julia, Fanny, and Louisa Clarcke. I did not enjoy myself. I disliked the governess. She was always teasing and persecuting the girls, and keeping them in such order that they had not a word to say. I have heard Lady Clarcke call Miss Harding "a treasure! and she is so careful with the dear girls' manners;" which really meant, every time they speak she snubs them. And the result was, the "dear girls" had no conversation whatever, except their whispered confidences about Miss Harding—who, they said, ate quantities of cakes and buns in her bedroom—could be called conversation. I did not much care for the Clarckes. I liked pretty little Louisa perhaps the best. She wanted me to be her "particular friend," and have "secrets." She wrote to me once when she was about sixteen. She hoped her *dear* Sophy was *quite* well; she hoped *dear* Mrs Thursley was *quite* well also; and she hoped, when *last* we heard from Dullshire, Mrs Sherbrook was *quite* well. She was sorry to tell me Julia's pony had hurt its leg, but she hoped it would *soon* be well again. She said the weather was *wet*, but hoped it would soon be *quite fine* again. And now, said she, "I must say good-bye; and hoping soon to hear from you, I remain, my dear Sophy, your affectionate friend, LOUISA CLARCKE."

The blotless letter was beautifully written with a steel pen. Miss Harding had evidently presided over the crossing of the

t's. This was the first note I had received from a girl of my own age. I supposed it was the right thing for a young lady to be hopeful when she wrote to her friends ; so I got a new pen, and hoped Louisa was quite well, and that Fanny and Julia were quite well, and that Sir Henry and Lady Clarke were quite well, and that Julia's pony was quite well. I also hoped it would not rain any more ; and then I found I had come to an end of my hopes ! My letter was not more than a page long, while Louisa had hoped on for a page and a half. I suddenly thought of Miss Harding, so I hoped her appetite was as good in Nottinghamshire as in London ; and then hoping I should soon hear from dear Louisa, I remained her affectionate friend,

SOPHY THURSLEY.

This last hope was not fulfilled. Louisa never wrote to her affectionate friend again. Miss Harding read all their letters, and was very angry I had hoped her appetite was good in Nottinghamshire. I feared I should have hoped too little ; and, alas ! I had hoped too much.

As a child I felt both pity and contempt for the Clarckes ; they were so deadly dull and stiffly well-behaved. Strange to say, when they "came out," they were decidedly "fast," and conceived a contempt for me ! They rode in the morning, drove in the afternoon, were more or less in society all day long, and went to two or three parties each night. They despised an unfashionable like me, who kept neither horse nor carriage. They would not have called our hired fly a carriage ; but, above all, they looked down disdainfully on a young lady who did not "go out" more than a dozen times during the season.

The Sherbrooks were with us when we received the invitation to the Clarckes' ball. As Aunt Jane thought balls wrong, she sighed, and groaned, and shook her curls. Uncle Sherbrook said nothing : not unfrequently this was a sign he intended to say something very serious at another time. Luckily, he forgot to do so : a letter arrived from his Harefield attorney, and he and my aunt went down to Sherbrook on very important business, which I naturally fancied must be about that everlasting right of way.

The morning of the ball I got a letter of excellent advice from my aunt. She drew a picture of the vanities and temptations of the ball-room : she cautioned me very seriously against the danger of flirtation ; she told me a passing admiration was not attachment, and said agreeable partners were heartless ;

she ended by imploring me not to dance the fast dances. When I read this letter, I felt as if I were posterity. It was a letter to publish for the edification of generations to come. I do hope Aunt Jane may have influence with posterity; it would be a satisfaction to her! I imagine she would have more influence with the present generation were she endowed with a slight sense of the ridiculous, and with a greater sense of the fitness of things.

I remembered Aunt Jane's good advice, and smiled as I looked in the glass and gave the last touch to my back hair. I thought no one would care to flirt with my nose, though its name is written in the Doomsday-Book. I am so accustomed to my own appearance that I never think of it, except on rare occasions like this one, and then I console myself and gratify my pride by fancying I must be the very image of the Doomsday-Book Thorslea. I am not a bit like either my father or my mother; and one thing is certain, I never could have invented myself. Stupid old Anglo-Saxon, I am proud of you! but why did not your nose die with you?

The Clarckes lived at Prince's Gate. We were asked for half-past ten. There was some mistake about ordering the carriage, so we did not arrive till near twelve. I feared we were very late, particularly as we met two ladies in the hall asking for their carriage. I heard one say, "Thomas is most provoking! At this rate we shall never find time for the Hartmoors'. We must go to the Lerekers' and Seymours'." "My dear," said the other, "Lady Julia will never forgive us unless we go to her."

I felt reassured, and more so when, on passing into Sir Henry's study, fitted up as a dressing-room, we found two other arrivals taking off their cloaks. One a tall, rather stylish, dark-eyed, very sallow lady, extremely *décolletée*, and of that certain age which decidedly is not young, nor yet quite old. Her daughter (I imagined her to be so) was a fine, tall dasher: she looked as if she ought to have had an aide-de-camp in full regimentals at her heels.

The elder lady dropped one of the morone velvet bows off her yellow dress, and I picked it up and gave it to her. She looked at me as if she would like to say, "I don't know you. Who are you?" A maid pinned on the bow, and then both ladies, drawing themselves up to their full height, sailed from the room with their tails flowing behind them. My mother politely moved aside to let them pass, and they stared at her. The younger lady had an eye-glass; the elder had none: so the

stare of the younger was the more difficult to bear. My mother blushed and whispered, "That is an awful eye-glass, Sophy!" "Awful!" said I. A servant showed us across the hall to the dining-room, and there we saw the eye-glass taking a cup of tea. "We will go up-stairs, Sophy," said my mother. She was a shy woman by nature, who hated to be stared at; and till now, she had gone out nowhere since my father's death, thirteen years ago.

So we went up-stairs. Unluckily, my mother's lace caught in the last turning of the banisters. I could not untwist it. I tried, and she tried, in vain. While thus occupied, the eye-glass and her chaperon brushed past us with difficulty, for there was really no room. The end of the chaperon's long yellow train wound itself round about my foot. I nearly fell. Recovering my balance, I unwound my lady's tail and squeezed myself against the wall. Though not in fault, I said, as I thought with much politeness, "I beg your pardon." Oh, what a look her Highness of the yellow tail gave me! I suppose she was now quite sure I intended to make her acquaintance. The sniff of her nostril was ridiculous; but I did not even smile, for I felt the daughter's eye-glass was upon me.

We were astonished to hear these two flashy ladies announced as "Mrs and Miss Thursley." My mother jumped from surprise, and disentangled her lace by tearing it. Lady Clarcke laughed and came forward to receive her guests. Our namesakes stopped short with horrified countenances. The elder lady corrected the footman in a loud indignant voice: "Lady Tutterton and Miss Tutterton," cried she, and the servant said nothing. Thursley had come first up the stairs to him through a footman and a waiter, so how was he to know that Tutterton would take precedence in person of Thursley? Her ladyship having announced herself, passed on.

"Never mind, my dear Georgina!" cried Lady Clarcke after her; "at any rate I know who you are!"

We shook hands with our hostess *incognite*—the puzzled servant remaining dumb.

"It is warmer this evening, Lady Clarcke," said my mother.

"And delighted I am to hear it, Mrs Thursley."

"This is the coldest June I ever remember," continued my mother.

"So I think," said Lady Clarcke; "but Sir Henry declares he recollects twenty years ago just such another chilly June."

"How is Sir Henry? I hope he is quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you. He was here this minute. Per-

haps he is watching the young people dance," and Lady Clarke pointed with her fan to the front drawing-room. She smiled, and we smiled, and we tried to move through a great crowd towards the dancing-room. The Tuttertons seemed to make their way without difficulty. The yellow-tailed bird of paradise in her ladyship's chignon was nodding inside the doorway. Yet my mother came to a dead stop; she hated pushing.

The music had ceased, and a file of dancers, the gentlemen going sideways first, and the ladies following, cut the army of chaperons in two. Mamma retreated down the first step of the stairs, and I found myself driven into the back drawing-room, and then shut up in a corner behind a table, on which was a large red-velvet stand, like a miniature staircase, covered with great big pots of azaleas and ferns. A stout, and I should say a slightly rouged dowager, with a large bustle, became imprisoned in this corner next me, but on the outer side. This lady had numerous acquaintances, who shook hands across the more distant end of the table with "Lady Arabella," as they called her, and stopped just long enough to remark the evening was a warm one, and to hope the hot weather was coming at last, "What a cold June we have had, Lady Arabella!" Her ladyship would then reply it was the coldest month of June she ever remembered.

After a time, I felt bored with the chilly month of June, and longed to escape from my prison behind Lady Arabella's flounces. I had almost made up my mind it was just possible to get past the furbelows, when a voice, coming across from the other side of the table, cried, "I have found you out at last, Lady Arabella!" My lady turned round with a whisk and rustle, and her skirt and her puffings seemed twice as large as before. I looked up and saw the bird of paradise fluttering its tail over the azaleas at my side.

"Ah, Lady Tutterton, is it you?"

"My dear Lady Arabella! Why, you are quite hidden away in that odious corner."

"Yes, indeed, and in a very warm corner too, I can assure you."

"Oh, my dear Lady Arabella, how I do pity you! Such a warm evening as it is! What a month of June we have had!"

And Lady Arabella once more remarked that she never remembered so cold a June.

"Dreadful!" said Lady Tutterton—"quite too dreadful! and my poor Georgina was perfectly hoarse the other night at that Mrs Elmer's concert."

We had a slight acquaintance with a Mrs Elmer-Elmer, who gave musical parties, so I listened with more interest than to the month of June. "But, my dear Lady Tutterton," said Lady Arabella, "Miss Tutterton was in excellent voice. Not that I should be surprised, I must say, at any one catching their death of cold in that Mrs Elmer's great, bare music-room," and Lady Arabella shrugged her shoulders as if she had the shivers. "You have heard about poor dear Prince Teck?" continued Lady Tutterton; "that Mrs Elmer—I beg pardon! Mrs Elmer-Elmer's draughts have given him a stiff neck and the influenza." The voice which mentioned the Duke of Teck was one of sympathetic sorrow. I thought, "Why, here is a lady who must be a bosom friend of all the Royal family. If one of their husbands, even a lesser one, gets a cold, she almost cries!"

Lady Arabella laughed. "That naughty man Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone made such a wicked riddle!" . . . Rigardy-Wrenstone! my cousin? Impossible! I was amazed, and listened with real interest this time. "But indeed," said Lady Arabella, "it was too bad of Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone! Excuse me, I can't help laughing when I think . . . I could not . . . pray don't ask me."

"Now really, Lady Arabella——"

"Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone would never forgive me."

"Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone shall never know, my dear Lady Arabella."

"I declare, Lady Tutterton, you are as wicked as Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone himself! Just fancy . . . But really I cannot."

"My dear Lady Arabella, I shall never guess! I never guessed but one riddle in my life."

"Then I will ask you the question; but mind, I decline to tell the answer. It is the answer which is so very, very naughty! What is the difference between that Mrs Elmer and the influenza?"

"The one," began Lady Tutterton, slowly—"the one . . . no, it can't be . . . yes . . . no . . . let me see. Ah yes! I declare I think I have it, Lady Arabella; the one caught a Prince, and the Prince caught the other. Capital! capital!"

"Lady Tutterton, I never, never should have asked you if . . . but you have heard it before?"

"My dear Lady Arabella! I can assure you, Lady Arabella——"

"Well, remember, Lady Tutterton, I did not tell you!"

At this moment the eye-glass came up leaning on . . . Denis!

—Denis, whom we imagined to be still in Canada, and not coming home till the next mail! I took one look to make sure. Yes, it was he—a little older and with a light moustache, but still a good deal out of joint, and searching for his shirt-cuff with the arm on which Miss Tutterton was not leaning. Denis could not see me. My first impulse was to press forward; my second, to shrink back into my corner. I was surprised; I was mortified to think Denis should be in London and not have come to see my mother, who was so fond of him!

I peeped through the azaleas and saw Lady Tutterton—the playful kittten!—put up her fan, half hiding her face. She exclaimed, “Oh, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, I am shocked!”

“Really, Lady Tutterton——”

“Oh, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, you pretend not to know? To be so amusing, and so original, and so clever, and so very, very wicked, and then to seem as if . . . Oh, you hypocrite!” And Lady Arabella chimed in with a “Fie! fie!”

My cousin looked greatly pleased, and again repeated, “Really, Lady Tutterton——”

“For shame! for shame, Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone! And that poor dear Mrs Elmer-Elmer! It is too cruel! now positively too cruel! Georgina, my dear, shall I tell you what difference there is between Mrs Elmer-Elmer and the influenza?”

“Thankee; I know!” replied the eye-glass, abruptly; “Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone told me. Awfully good! Thought I should die laughing!”

“Don’t die, my dear,” exclaimed Lady Arabella; “remember you must live till Monday. Surely you do not forget Monday, Miss Tutterton?” Her ladyship did not wait for an answer. She answered herself—“No, no; you don’t forget. I know you have the greatest pleasure in singing at my house—so very kind of you! But all our best amateurs are delighted to sing for me, because I never give my friends cold like that Mrs Elmer. I am——” Lady Arabella interrupted herself suddenly—“My dear Miss Tutterton! but I was quite forgetting! I have a great favour to ask of you. You will sing a solo for me on Monday? Now say you will.”

“Thought we were to have no solos, Lady Arabella.”

“But we really must have just one little exception to our rule,” cried her ladyship, “and that exception must be Miss Tutterton. The Pasha said to me yesterday (he speaks French like a Frenchman), ‘*Miladi Arabella, la prima-donna*’ (of course he meant you, my dear)—‘*la prima-donna va chanter un solo pour nous Lundi prochain.*’” Lady Arabella spoke French

better than Aunt Jane, but not as the present generation of Ladies Arabella speak it. She continued—“‘*Mong Pacha, je lui ferai votre demande* ;’ and he answered, with the bow of the Grand Monarque, ‘*Je vous en remercie beaucoup, miladi*.’ What polish! What delightful, easy, agreeable manners that fascinating Bey has, to be sure! And to think he is a Turk! I always call him *mong marquis turc*! Quite a marquis of the *ancien régime*!”

“And the fez is *so* becoming a dark complexion!” exclaimed Lady Tutterton.

“Haw!” said my cousin; “Pasha not a bad fellow. Met him other night at Furley’s. Miss Tutterton, Lancers are over. Our waltz, last waltz! Lerekers have a ball on to-night. Must go to Hartmoor’s. Awful bore!”

The eye-glass, smiling and bowing, but more awkwardly than graciously, took Denis’s proffered arm and marched off under a volley of polite little spasmodic ejaculations from Lady Arabella. “A thousand thanks! So very kind! Next Monday! You are too good! I am quite overcome! What a dear, good-natured creature she is, Lady Tutterton!”

“Poor dear Georgina! It is a sad, sad pity she is so timid,” said the flattered mother. “It is a sad, sad pity; but who can blame her? I am so shy myself. ... When I was her age, I used to flutter all over just——”

“Ah, don’t speak of it, Lady Tutterton! I know what it is. I am a martyr to shyness myself. Even now, when——” And Lady Arabella and Lady Tutterton told each other, through the azaleas, touching anecdotes illustrative of their sensitive and shrinking natures. They pitied themselves, and wished they were more like other people.

I was now out of all patience! I could not imagine what had become of my mother. I burned to tell her whom I had seen, and to know if she had met my cousin. I saw, however, it would be useless pushing to get out of my corner. Lady Arabella could no more move than I could. She was hemmed in by chaperons, some of whom were hopelessly seated; and there were divers tables besides, even worse than chaperons, for they are fixtures who never go down to supper. I fretted, and fumed, and felt so angry, that in my impatience I broke off a twig from one of the azaleas. My view was much enlarged by this accident, though I could see Lady Tutterton no better than before—just the black chignon and the bird of paradise, one hand, and the velvet bow on her extremely short sleeve; yet I was now enabled to see half the room without the trouble

of peeping. There was a break in the crowd. I soon caught sight of my mother's head towering above the surrounding dowagers. My mother was taller than they, and much better-looking, and she knew how to dress herself after a fashion becoming to her age. She had beautiful white hair, which most of the other elderly ladies had not: old ladies nowadays but rarely turn grey. Their locks seem to turn almost any other colour but the one you would expect. And such chignons as they wear to support the tow-rows of lace and lappets, and flowers and ribbons, with which their heads are disfigured! As to Lady Arabella, she wore what I might call the hanging gardens of Babylon on her head. I never saw such roses, and posies, and daffydowndillies, trailing here and there and everywhere!

My mother was a very handsome woman. Her head, which she always carried rather far back, was grandly set upon her long and still white neck. Her complexion—the complexion of reddish-auburn hair—was wonderful; for at the time I speak of, she must have been between fifty and sixty years of age, and yet she was what our ancestors would have called a comely woman, fair to look upon. She had a remarkably distinguished air. I defy any one to have guessed her to be my mother or Aunt Jane's sister. Aunt Jane thought mamma held up her head and looked like Jezebel, for piety and dowdiness were inseparably joined in my aunt's imagination. No matter what my dear mother put on, she always appeared well dressed. This night she wore a silver-grey dress, trimmed with white lace, [caught up by large grey bows. Mamma made the bows herself, and I pinned them on; they were pinched and twisted to perfection. There was a dash about them, and I must say the whole effect was striking. Aunt Jane looked askance at her sister's greys and dove-colours, and declared mamma would next wear green and say that was mourning.

I heard Lady Arabella ask Lady Tutterton who the tall person in grey was, "for I know the face as well as my own; but I have such an unfortunate memory for names. Now who can she be?"

"Some sort of widow, I suppose," said Lady Tutterton; "for silver-grey is the natural frontier of a bereaved spirit."

"Now, really, you are too witty to-night, my dear Lady Tutterton!" exclaimed Lady Arabella, putting up those heavy gold glasses of hers with the long gold chain. She stared at my mother.

Lady Arabella had a kindly, good-humoured face. She did

not look ill-natured when she stared : she only stared as many an English lady does stare—for the pleasure and satisfaction of the thing. She evidently approved of the silver-grey widow, bows and all, for she said, “A fine figure.”

“Too stout for my taste,” replied the skinny Lady Tutterton.

“Still, decidedly a fine figure,” repeated Lady Arabella ; “and *très-bien mise*. I certainly feel as if I knew her. If I only knew her name, I should speak to her ; for, you see, I have a dozen of my concert tickets that I can’t dispose of, and she might take some. Now, really, I do wonder if she can be any one.”

“Dear, no,” said Lady Tutterton ; “I rather imagine the name is Thusby. The footman made a mistake, and announced it instead of ours. Thusby or Thubby, he said ; or perhaps it was Thubs.”

“Thubs, Lady Tutterton ! She does not look the name.”

“Then if she does not, Lady Arabella, her daughter does. I suppose it was her daughter—a sort of person who evidently wished to make my acquaintance.”

I coughed to show there was some one listening, but the ladies would take no notice.

“My dear Lady Arabella,” exclaimed Lady Tutterton at the top of her voice, “as to the daughter, why, you never saw a plainer platter-face in your life !”

“Excuse me,” I said, with studied politeness. Both ladies started. “Excuse me for interrupting you a moment ; but I think, before this conversation goes further, it might be wiser to let the plain platter-face out of her corner !”

I stood on tiptoe and peeped over the azaleas. I fancied I caught Lady Tutterton’s eye ; and yet, perhaps, I was mistaken, for she seemed to be looking the other way, and fanned herself absently. Lady Arabella turned round and faced me. The hanging gardens turned with her, because they were fastened to her back hair ; but the skirt and puffings had not room to turn. They nearly smothered me. Lady Arabella’s glasses were still up, and she stared at me with a mixture of dignity and surprise. It was quite ridiculous. I could not help smiling. “I am Miss Thubs. Would you kindly let me pass ?”

Poor little Lady Arabella ! She really was shocked. She fell into a spasm of apology : “Never imagined . . . Lady Tutterton . . . just a little deaf . . . a strange mistake . . . not at all plain . . . quite charming, my dear !”

“Ah no,” said I. “What she said is quite true.” I blushed.

"I know it myself; only—only I did not think other people would see it as much as I do. I now perceive they remark it more."

Lady Arabella was on the verge of another apology, but I stopped her by begging she would kindly make way and let me escape into the outer world. However, that proved impossible. The crush was now so great, she could not move a step. The bustle, still pushed forward by the table at our side, would stick out the wrong way; and beyond this stronghold of Lady Arabella's, there were barricades of chairs and chaperons. I had to remain where I was. I saw my mother looking about everywhere for me. At last I managed to attract her attention by fluttering my fan through the gap in the azaleas. A surge in the moving crowd brought her a little nearer to my prison, but it was in vain she tried to get nearer still. She talked to me on her fingers, but I could not understand a single sign she made: except G and H, I cannot read the deaf and dumb alphabet, though Aunt Jane has often tried to teach it to me, —because "any woman," says she, "may be called upon to marry a deaf and dumb husband, for the ways of Providence are inscrutable."

I guessed from mamma's signs and beckonings that she had seen Denis, and was much surprised. I nodded to her as much as to say, I have seen him too.

"May I ask," said Lady Arabella, "if the lady——"

"My mother?"

"Ah! so I presumed. The handsome lady in grey—if her name is——"

"Thubs?" I said.

But Lady Arabella looked as if she might again fall into a fit of apology, so I hastened to tell her our real name.

"Thursley?" she repeated. "Ah, to be sure; I know. A near connection of the Dullshire Sherbrooks?"

I explained the relationship.

"And the Sherbrooks," continued Lady Arabella, "are related to the Stewarts, and the Stewarts are cousins of the Clinchfisted Scotts. A Stewart married James tenth Earl of Clinchfisted."

"Certainly," said I, though I knew nothing whatever of the matter. I felt safe in thus claiming a titled connection for the Stewarts. Uncle Sherbrook had long ago convinced me there never yet existed a Scotch family that was not nearly related to an earl, a marquis, and a duke.

Lady Arabella hoped to have the pleasure of renewing her

acquaintance with Mrs Thursley, if only Mrs Thursley would come a little nearer. She bowed to my mother, and my mother bowed to her. Lady Arabella told me she had met Mrs Thursley in Dullshire. She knew Harefield well. The Sherbrooks and Wrenstones were old friends; but Mrs Thursley had married and left the county before Lady Arabella came into it. Lady Arabella said she had a great respect for Mr Sherbrook. "Excellent man, Mr Sherbrook! Admirable woman, Mrs Sherbrook!"

I repeated, "Admirable!"

"So interested in the civilisation of the Negro race!"

"Oh yes!" said I. "At one time she was always hemming pocket-handkerchiefs for the Blacks; but she does not do so any more, she——"

"I know, I know!" interrupted Lady Arabella. "We have perhaps been more anxious latterly to promote the spiritual and temporal welfare of the benighted inmates of the Turkish harems."

"The concert tickets!" said I to myself.

"I have almost," continued Lady Arabella, "made my Pasha promise he will only have one wife when he returns to Constantinople; and she is not to wear only a short petticoat and long . . . long . . . *de longs pantalons*," whispered her ladyship.

"Indeed!" cried I.

"Yes," said Lady Arabella. "I am now trying to get up a subscription for the promotion of long black-silk skirts amongst the Turkish ladies."

"Admirable charity!" said I.

"They must be silk," said Lady Arabella; "the conceited creatures would not wear alpaca. From what I hear, I consider the dress of the seraglio far too gaudy: bright colours foster vanity in the half-civilised mind, and the Turks are only in the second degree of civilisation."

"Ah! just so. And the Turkish ladies are to have black-silk skirts? Will you also give them bustles?"

I am sorry to say I got no answer to this question; for there was a great stir in the host of dowagers—chairs creaked, ladies stood up and trod on each other's dresses, and apologised or scowled as the case might be. The few elderly gentlemen offered their arm to a few elderly ladies. Sir Henry Clarke was fussing about, looking to the right, to the left, in all directions. The company made way for him, and pushed aside chairs; and just as I was asking the question about the bustles,

up he came to take Lady Arabella down to supper. He helped her from her corner ; she turned to say a parting word to me. "There are one or two tickets for my concert not yet disposed of. Mrs Thursley and Mrs——" Before she had finished her sentence, I had slipped from my prison. I thought I could finish it for her : "Mrs Thursley and Mrs Sherbrook would, I am sure, like to take them." I knew my dear mother had not much money to spare for stray charities, and I did not think she would care to contribute towards the promotion of black-silk petticoats in the Turkish harems.

"Sophy," said my mother, "I could not speak to him. I saw him go away. Have you seen him?"

"I have."

"He must have arrived yesterday. I know Denis arrived yesterday, or he would have come—he would have come to see me ; I know, Sophy, he would have come. Though perhaps he could not get his luggage, or he was prevented by——" and my mother ran through a list of probable and improbable excuses. She talked on for five minutes, repeating every now and then, "Your Aunt Jane may say what she likes ; he is very fond of me. He would have come, Sophy, if he could ; I know he would."

I listened and said nothing. At last mamma changed the conversation, and asked me if I had been dancing.

"What!" she exclaimed ; "has no one asked to be introduced to you ? Most extraordinary!"

She looked hurt.

"In my youth," said she, "gentlemen always asked to be introduced to the nice young ladies."

"Perhaps they do so still, dear ; but nice means pretty, and pretty does not mean me."

"Nonsense, Sophy!" cried my mother. "Hold up your head, my love ; you are the most spirited-looking girl in the room."

I wonder she did not tell me I was the handsomest ! I smiled to see her so blind. However, on the whole, I rather think it is pleasanter, when you know you are ugly, for your friends to be a little blind.

My mother led the way to the ball-room.

"Come, Sophy," she said ; "if Mr David Scott is still here, he will dance with you. I was speaking to him a short time ago. He never forgets that day when he and I sold worsted-work together for the benefit of Lady Arabella's Blacks. He is her nephew."

"Mamma," said I, "Lady Arabella hopes to renew her acquaintance with you."

"Then," cried my mother, "the Hottentots are short of handkerchiefs!"

"No," I said; "it is the sultanas who want petticoats."

The crush was now much less. My mother peeped into the ball-room.

"He is dancing!" she exclaimed. "How unlucky!"

Before the gallop was finished, Lady Clarke sent mamma down to supper with an old gentleman.

Lady Clarke spoke to me, but did not offer to introduce any one for the next dance. I felt a little disappointed, as I should have liked to dance. I stood in the doorway and watched the waltzers. My longing spirit beat time to the music, and I wished I was a pinch of what Aunt Jane would call "pretty, flirting, silly dust and ashes." I had often heard my aunt speak a word in season on the subject of flirting. As I was not intimate with any young lady but myself, I had no idea what sort of crime it was, and I naturally felt most anxious to discover. That is the worst of sermons. They reveal the unsuspected, and make us inquisitive about undreamt-of sins. I wondered if I should see any one flirt; and I hoped I should.

I looked around me, and my roving eyes fell upon my old acquaintance, pretty little Louisa Clarke. She was not dancing, but stood talking to, or rather smiling at, her partner. Louisa's mouth never quite shut. If she had had anything to say, there would have been no trouble in saying it. Nature had parted those cherry lips; yet they rarely spoke—they only smiled.

As a child Louisa was always smiling when not actually crying. She never wept for long, but those tender blue eyes of hers filled easily with tears. They were pretty, sleepy eyes, with drooping lids and brown lashes, and tears became them. Indeed I never saw any one look pretty when crying except Louisa. There was no passion, no reddening convulsion, in her childish grief; she just melted away!

But now she was all soft smiles; and very charming she looked to my eye in her white ball-dress, with her wavy light hair and her dimpled pink cheeks. Her partner's conversation seemed to delight her; and he naturally appeared much pleased at the effect of his own agreeability. He had an eager, lively air, and spoke with much animation.

As I write, I seem to see that eager, lively look. I see David stand before me as he stood that night with Louisa smiling by his side. For this is one of the pictures in my life. When I look back over the past dim years, I feel as if I walked through some long and deserted gallery, where here and there on the

mouldering wall hangs a brightly coloured picture. I stop, and gaze, and wonder at its brilliancy where all else is grey and dim. Thus when my memory looks back upon this picture of Louisa and David as I saw them at my first ball, it is all so vivid, that my heart beats time to the music, and the dancers waltz by me again.

But at the moment I never dreamt I was receiving a lasting impression ; I merely felt bored. I was tired of standing the whole evening doing nothing, so I leant against the open door and watched Louisa in a listless, sleepy fashion. I hardly knew I was watching her, till I heard a lady behind me whisper to another lady at my elbow, "That Miss Louisa Clarke, the youngest daughter, is an accomplished flirt." This, then, is flirting, thought I.

"She is rather pretty," said the one voice.

"Insipid," rejoined the other, "and bad style. I would not allow my daughter to cast eyes——"

I was quite disgusted at these ladies' unkind remarks, when Louisa looked so happy. It seemed to me like throwing a curse over her beauty. I thought in my heart how pleasant it must be to be talked to and amused ; how much pleasanter than the lot of the plain platter-face, crushed into corners behind chaperons, and never asked to dance ! I sympathised in Louisa's happiness, and felt that flirting was a pleasant, lively thing, and that I, too, should like to flirt.

Many people were now coming up from supper. Fanny and Julia Clarke brushed past me with a nod. They did not do the manners in their own house, or speak to any one, except to the gentlemen with whom they danced. Louisa also passed me with her partner on her way down-stairs, and hardly seemed to know me.

I went out on the lobby and leant over the banisters, and down below in the hall I saw the Tuttertons wrapped in their opera-cloaks, shaking hands with Sir Henry ; so I supposed the party was breaking up. I yawned behind my fan, and hoped we should soon go home. I thought balls dull, dreary things, not at all exciting or wicked—quite different from what Aunt Jane had led me to expect. Yawn followed yawn, and time went slowly. At length I caught sight of my mother down below talking to a bundle of shawls and muftees. This I imagined to be Lady Arabella, because I saw trailing leaves and rosebuds appearing through the wrappers. Lady Arabella vanished quickly, and shortly afterwards my mother was brought back to the landing on which I stood, by her old gentleman, who bowed and went off in search of another supperless dowager.

"Sophy," exclaimed my mother, looking quite elated, "I have been most courageous! I have decidedly refused to promote the black-silk petticoat in the Turkish harems. I had just time to say No when Lady Arabella's carriage was called, and she was forced to run away."

While mamma was speaking, Louisa Clarke and her partner brushed past us, and went into the dancing-room."

"Ah! there is Mr Scott," said my mother. "I will introduce you to him—now indeed I will."

Before I could stop her, she was gone. I followed her to the ball-room, where the violin was tuning. I found her speaking to Louisa Clarke's agreeable partner, and I perceived Louisa sitting near the door. My mother introduced the gentleman as Mr David Scott. He was polite enough; but as we were taking our places for the quadrille, I saw him look towards Louisa and give the slightest possible little shrug of his shoulders. Louisa smiled and nodded to him. There was then what I felt to be an awkward silence between Mr Scott and me, so I remarked, like the rest of the world, "It is warmer this evening." And Mr Scott replied, like the rest of the world, "We have had a very cold month of June."

We danced. I enjoyed it. Between times, I tried three or four topics of conversation, but my partner barely answered me. He kept looking towards Louisa, and was at little pains to conceal that he felt bored. When the music stopped, and the dancers went flocking down-stairs, Mr Scott asked me if I would like some supper; but I had pity on him, and thanking him, said No, though I was very hungry. With pleased alacrity he took me back to my mother.

I looked at my watch, and found it was half-past two o'clock. Mamma wanted me to stay a little longer, as she was quite sure Mr David Scott would ask me to dance again, but I persuaded her it was time to go home.

We had some difficulty in getting our carriage. Flymen are not like one's own coachman. The Park gates were closed. The deserted streets looked melancholy. We were both tired, and only spoke twice. Once, in Park Lane, mamma said, "Sophy, it is a thousand pities we could not get near Denis. He would have been very glad to see us." And I said, "I hope so, my dear." And once more, going down Great Cumberland Place, "Sophy," exclaimed my mother, "when your Aunt Jane returns to-morrow, we need not tell her we saw Denis at the ball. She sometimes makes unkind remarks." "She does," said I.

CHAPTER IV.

The Sherbrooks, attended by the invaluable Sarah Snipkins, arrived in time for luncheon next day. I saw at a glance that "dear Edward" was bilious. He declared the cabman asked too much; and while he was paying exactly the right fare, he would hold his hat-box in one hand and the umbrellas under the other arm. He dropped a shilling, and in picking it up let the umbrellas fall into the mud. Aunt Jane gave a little scream, and Snipkins rushed into the street.

"Mrs Sherbrook's best humbrella, sir!"

"Snipkins, you expect me to carry everything." This was said most severely.

"I've been hasking hof you, sir, for those 'ere humbrellas——" pleaded the injured Snipkins.

"And you will never get them," cried out my uncle; "I know what it is to let other people carry one's umbrella and hat-box."

He took two strides from the cab into the hall. He did not say, "How do you do?"

"One portmanteau," said he, counting the luggage, "a bonnet-box, the small trunk, the large trunk, two carpet . . . Confound it, Jane! . . ."

"My dear Edward!"

"Confound it, Jane! where is the little black bag?"

I had seen our John take it up-stairs. "It is here, Uncle Sherbrook."

"Be quiet, Sophy!" thundered my uncle.

"But I saw——"

"Hold your tongue, and go into the dining-room."

"Yes, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt; "you would fuss any one. Your uncle and I are never fussy if we are let alone."

I went into the dining-room, and my mother followed me. We could hear Uncle Sherbrook accusing everybody of having lost his little black bag, and Aunt Jane exclaiming piteously that she never lost anything, not even her hand-bag, or her bonnet-box, or her brown shawl.

"And, my dear Edward, the time you lost your hat-box, it was you yourself put it——"

"The time I lost my hat-box?" shouted Uncle Sherbrook.

Luckily at this moment John appeared upon the scene, and said Mr Sherbrook had given him the little black bag before

ever he got out of the cab, and had told him to take it straight up to his dressing-room, as Mr Sherbrook was sure it would be lost.

"Quite right, John—quite right," said my uncle; "if I did not take care of that black bag it would have been lost long ago."

Aunt Jane came smiling into the dining-room. "Edward has found the black bag. John had taken it up-stairs."

"Yes, I saw him," said I.

"And why did you not say so? Really, Sophy, you are most provoking."

"My dear aunt, I was going to."

"Hush, Sophy!" said Aunt Jane; for Uncle Sherbrook entered the room, still looking very much upset. I wondered what could be the matter with him. I felt sure it was not merely the little black bag, for I had hardly ever known the Sherbrooks arrive in Montagu Square without there being a fuss about that black bag. It was too large for a hand-bag, and Uncle Sherbrook never would let it go with the rest of the luggage. He was always losing it, or fancying it was lost. Now he generally recovered the black bag and his temper at the same time.

Luncheon was on the table at five minutes past one instead of being punctually at one o'clock. Uncle Sherbrook declared he could not stay to eat anything, as he was in a great hurry off to the City on business. Those who have not heard Uncle Sherbrook or Aunt Jane say the word "business," can have no idea what a solemn, pompous word it is. Aunt Jane is convinced the best constitution in the world would give way if you did not eat three punctual meals a-day. Any trifling with the digestion she considers a matter of grave importance. So with a serious face she persuaded "dear Edward" to eat a cutlet. He ate two, and with a very good appetite, I thought; but when they were offered to him, he first refused them, and then wondered we did not prefer plain mutton-chops to greasy bread-crumbed cutlets. My mother smiled at me.

When "dear Edward" left the table, Aunt Jane trotted after him into the hall, begging him not to forget his great-coat.

"It is hot now, my dear," said the affectionate teasing wife, "but it may be cold before evening."

Uncle Sherbrook did not answer: he banged the hall-door.

My aunt came back to her luncheon, lamenting that dear Edward would catch his death of cold.

"This broiling day, Jane?" said my mother.

"Sophia," replied my aunt, "I regret to say you do not understand the rules of health. If you would have taken my advice——"

Aunt Jane cast her eyes upon me, and I felt the conversation was coming round to "poor dear Sophy" and her spine, so I turned it by saying, "Aunt Jane, I fear Uncle Sherbrook is a little . . . a little . . . bilious to-day."

"Is it the liver, Jane?" asked my mother.

My aunt looked round the room in a mysterious manner.

"We are alone," said I.

"Edward," whispered Aunt Jane, "has . . . business." This awful word was nearly inaudible.

"Business on the liver!" cried I; "what a terrible disease!"

"Sophy," answered my aunt, "if you could be brought to a serious and proper frame of mind, you would understand that our temporary stewardship of this world's goods is a great responsibility. Your uncle knows he has a solemn duty to perform. Sophia," she added, addressing my mother, "Edward has changed his attorney, and I fervently hope and trust he has at last found a Christian . . . person,"—I think Aunt Jane was going to say "gentleman"; but she does not consider an attorney quite a gentleman,—"a Christian person who will serve God, not mammon."

"Changed his attorney!" cried mamma; "left poor old Jones! I will not leave the old man, Jane, after all these years——"

"To be sure you won't, Sophia! It is all the same to you what a man's religious views are, if he is an Arian, a Unitarian——"

"My dear Jane! Mr Jones an Arian and Unitarian! and both together at the same time!"

Now I do believe Aunt Jane merely said Arian and Unitarian as high-sounding words of abuse. "I don't accuse Mr Jones of anything," continued my aunt. "Mr Jones has his own views, no doubt. I will not say Mr Jones is not what he ought to be; but I must allow, as Snipkins says, that it does not look well in Harefield for Squire Sherbrook's man of business to be seen roving about from one place of worship to another, so that you cannot tell, by looking at his pew on Sunday, if he attends two services or one. As Snipkins says, when he is off at the meeting-house, or perhaps at a Papist chapel for a change, his empty seat looks as if he did not go to church at all. In-

deed, Snipkins says, from what she hears, that she would not be surprised, any Sabbath morning, to see a white cow tethered in Mr Jones's garden, and Mr Jones bowing down to it, like one of those benighted Hindoo heathens in Dr MacShaw's Sabbath tales."

I laughed aloud at the idea of old Jones, the Harefield attorney, worshipping a cow in the small strip of garden between his house and the county road. But my mother was very serious.

"Snipkins! Snipkins! Jane, you shock me!" she exclaimed. "I wonder you can listen to Snipkins's gossip."

"Snipkins," said my aunt, with an injured sniff of the nostril,—"Snipkins is an honest, Christian-minded woman, who has her master's true interest at heart."

"And her own, too, Jane, believe me; it is human nature."

"Yes, yes, Sophia, I know you are prejudiced against poor Snipkins. Truth-telling, straightforward servants always make enemies. Some people, Sophia, do not care to know the sinful practices of their household, and if a high-minded maid tells the truth——"

"Jane! Jane!" exclaimed my mother, out of all patience, "I know what you mean, but I really cannot let Snipkins interfere in——"

"Snipkins," said Aunt Jane, — "poor Snipkins! she is dragged into every argument. But I don't wish to argue with you, Sophia; you may argue with Sophy if you like."

The door opened, and John entered with a letter. He said a servant was waiting for the answer. I thought the interruption a lucky one.

The note looked very short; and yet my mother read it twice, and hardly seemed able to understand it. "The servant need not wait, John," she said at last, and then read the letter a third time. "Incomprehensible!" she exclaimed,—"incomprehensible! when I told Lady Arabella I would not have them! And guinea tickets! I told her plainly I would not take them. She understood me perfectly; and now to write and say that, at my request, she has reserved two seats expressly for Sophy and me, and that if I would kindly send the two guineas by the messenger, she will bring the tickets herself in the course of the afternoon." And my mother again repeated, "Incomprehensible! incomprehensible!"

All letters made Aunt Jane inquisitive, and now her curiosity was intense. She took Lady Arabella's letter out of mamma's hand and read it. "Why, Sophia," she said, "there is a mes-

sage for me, and you never gave it to me. Edward and I will certainly take the tickets, and I will really make Edward go, for I know all about this charity: it is an excellent one, and Catherine has been collecting for it; and Lady Arabella and I have often deplored together the shocking vanity and levity of the wretched unbelieving inmates of the Turkish harems, and Lady Arabella knows I thoroughly approve of this good work. She is quite right in saying she is sure I shall be delighted to take the concert tickets, and I will send her the two guineas this very moment, with yours, Sophia."

"The servant is gone, Aunt Jane; I heard him shut the hall-door."

"Then I will send the money by Snipkins, and you can send yours too, Sophia."

"But I am not going to take the tickets, Jane."

"Sophia, Sophia, I am astonished you do not care to support this admirable charity, for it is a good work, and it has my warmest approval, and we should indeed consider ourselves blessed in being permitted to be instruments under Providence in the amelioration of the benighted condition of the Mahometan wife and mother. And, Sophia, I heartily share Lady Arabella's views on this subject: and indeed, Sophia, you know you are generally in the wrong, and Edward and I deplore it; but you will never take our advice."

And thus arguing, the truth or the untruth in this matter entirely escaped Aunt Jane's strangely constituted mind, though my mother told her that what she really objected to was having the tickets kept for her "at her own request," when she had distinctly said she would not have them. Yet Aunt Jane still sided with Lady Arabella; not from worldly motives — Aunt Jane is not worldly—but because "whosoever is not for us is against us. Sophia, you do not care to support this excellent charity."

Aunt Jane stayed at home that afternoon to see Lady Arabella if she called, but we both purposely went out.

When we returned from our walk, we were much relieved to find Lady Arabella had been, and was gone. John said her ladyship had stayed a long time, and that her ladyship on leaving had told him to tell Mrs Thursley how sorry her ladyship was not to see her, and as her ladyship could not wait any longer, she had given John two cards to give Mrs Thursley with her compliments. The cards were two concert tickets.

Lady Arabella had gained the day, for my mother kept them. At first she said she would send them back, but on second

thoughts her courage failed her, and she sent the two guineas instead. Lady Arabella was to be met all over Dullshire, and mamma did not want to lay up a quarrel for herself at Sherbrook Hall. Besides, if there was any coolness, and my mother and Lady Arabella cut each other, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would certainly take her ladyship's part. "Dear, good, charitable Lady Arabella!" And many people in Dullshire took their opinion from Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. She, too, was an excellent person, and powerful in her way, though not as yet, quite so powerful in the county as Lady Arabella; for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was merely a pattern of untitled excellence, whilst Lady Arabella Scott represented titled perfection—charity in all its beauty! And how beautiful a thing is titled charity in country parts!

When Lady Arabella left the tickets my mother had refused to take, I cannot help thinking she had perceived the points in her favour, and had weighed her chances of success. I have since heard of other fashionable patronesses of bazaars and concerts who have fought the good fight with weapons not unlike those of Lady Arabella Scott.

We found Aunt Jane in the greatest excitement after Lady Arabella's visit, for Lady Arabella had told her a great piece of news. My aunt seemed to have forgotten both the Turkish harems and the concert tickets.

"Sophia! Sophia! I have news for you! Denis is not in Canada, he is in town; and he is going to sell out of the army! And he is paying attention to Miss Tutterton, Sir Horace Tutterton's only daughter and only child; and, indeed, Lady Arabella thinks they are actually engaged. He met her at Quebec, for Sir Horace was in command out there. He used to be Colonel Tutterton of the Guards when I used to hear of him, but he is a general now and a K.C.B. I know all about the Tuttertons. Lady Tutterton is Lady Clarcke's cousin; besides, Louisa Stewart, Edward's cousin, was nearly related to Sir Horace's only sister's first husband . . . no . . . yes, that was it—I am quite right; it was to Sir Horace's only sister's first husband that she was related—a Fraser of Drumloch . . . no, I meant to say a Malcolm of Craigburn . . . no, I was right after all: I remember he was a Fraser of Drumloch, and when he died she married——"

"Who married whom, Jane?" cried my mother. Her sister's pedigrees and intermarriages irritated her.

"Kitty Fraser married . . ." I suggested—"A truly Christian gentleman, Aunt Jane."

"The Lord forbid I should condemn any one," sighed my aunt; "we are led to hope for the salvation of the Gentiles——"

"And surely of Kitty Fraser too," cried I; but Aunt Jane did not seem at all certain either Kitty Fraser or her husband would be saved. From what Louisa Stewart had told her, she feared Kitty Fraser had Romanist tendencies.

"And the Tuttertons, Sophia, are Ritualistic in their views. Lady Arabella deplores it, and it will be such a misfortune for Harefield. And, indeed, if Denis makes this match, I shall not approve of it."

Mamma said—"Jane, I do not think your opinion will be asked."

"Sophia," replied Aunt Jane, "you were no doubt consulted on the matter last night, for I hear Denis was at the ball."

"Yes, yes," said my mother, hastily, "but I only saw him at a distance."

"Then, Sophia, it is to be presumed he saw you at a distance also."

"No, he did not see me," exclaimed my mother, reddening with emotion. "Jane, Jane, you are too cruel!" and with flashing eyes she added, "too bitter for a saint!"

"Bitter!" repeated my aunt in amazement. Then dragging down the upper lip, she said, "Sophia, I am astonished you should give way to such violence;" and she whispered in a reproachful tone, "before Sophy."

I declared out loud that I was not a bit shocked. A very decided "Hush, child!" was the answer.

"Jane," said my mother, casting an appealing look at her sister—"Jane, why do you want me to hate my brother's son, when I loved poor Denis, and he is dead?"

"Yes, indeed, Sophia, and you showed your love by never contradicting him, and always doing what he liked, and spoiling that boy to please him." Aunt Jane's anger was rising. "It was I," she said, "who did my duty, and told him the truth the very last time I went to the Abbey, before he died; and I told him what that boy must inevitably turn out, and I said——" My aunt stopped to take breath.

"You said," cried I, "'foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.' Now I know you did, Aunt Jane."

My aunt reproved me for quoting Scripture. She said I was becoming impious; she had long foreseen this would be the case, but my mother never would take her advice. "No, Sophia has her own ideas of education, and very unsuccessful she has

been with her daughter and her nephew ; for I am sure Sophy is not what she ought to be, and I never knew a less affectionate or a more ungrateful young man than Denis, though you call him your own boy, Sophia."

"Yes, my own boy," retorted mamma. "Oh, Jane, will you go on for ever?"

"He does not even love you, Sophia."

I was standing beside my mother. "Sophy," she whispered to me, "Denis is fond of us."

Willing to please her, I answered, "My dear, he must love you."

She pressed my hand in hers. "No, Sophy," she murmured ; "he does not care for me : he has no heart. I know it. I found it out two years ago. But don't tell your Aunt Jane. I would not tell her for the world." My mother's eyes filled with tears, and she left the room.

My aunt neither heard nor saw her sister, she was far too busy talking to herself. I caught, "Godless young man . . . I always said so . . . My advice." She did not perceive my mother was gone.

"Sophia," she exclaimed, "you are infatuated with the boy!"

"Mamma is not here," said I ; "and really, Aunt Jane, you do tease her ; you make her ill, you——"

My aunt raised her eyes and one hand to heaven. "When children rise up in judgment against their elders," she cried ; and then, with great command of Scriptural language and much volubility, she prophesied every sort of misfortune for me, and more than hinted at my eternal damnation.

I listened with a certain sort of amused indifference. I rarely went to the trouble of getting angry with Aunt Jane. Indeed what is the use of working yourself into a passion with what a person says, when by the time you are really excited you find that person saying something else—perhaps the contrary ; or perhaps she has passed to a different subject altogether ? Aunt Jane possessed to a remarkable degree the art of easy transitions. I do not know how she managed them, for when I saw her well under way I but half listened to her. From me, and the melancholy future in store for me, she sailed on quite naturally to Mr Boggle, Uncle Sherbrook's new attorney, —to Snipkins, to punctuality, and even, I believe, to the Liberal Ministry and the modern Babylon. When in good spirits I rather enjoyed what Aunt Jane called "arguing," though of argument there was none ; but if I were tired, my aunt bewildered me, and I sank exhausted into silence. Since the

Sherbrooks and Snipkins had arrived at the hall-door, the air of our house had seemed to me charged with the most fatiguing sort of sound doctrine ; so I felt worn out. I let Aunt Jane talk on for an hour, and just feigned to listen.

When at last Uncle Sherbrook returned from the city, he and Aunt Jane shut themselves up in their bedroom until dinner-time ; and when they reappeared to our sight, they looked as if they had been signing their late attorney's death-warrant.

Neither my uncle nor my aunt said a word about Denis's engagement. My uncle's whole mind was engrossed by a far more important matter than a mere wedding. We could see the solemn mystery of "Business" overshadowed him. He awed me. I should hardly have thought it decorous in his awful presence to have touched on any subject less solemn than the eternal damnation of mankind. Now I never felt this to be quite a safe topic ; for when my uncle and aunt vigorously burnt all Papists in hell, I could not refrain from stretching out a helping hand to the condemned Monsieur Tolain—and this set fire to myself, to my mother, and to us all.

My mother and I were glad to be allowed to remain silent during dinner-time. As to Aunt Jane, she drew down her upper lip and tried hard to hold her tongue. She was mysteriously discreet, alluding in parables to persons who looked for figs on thistles, and to good seed sown in good ground, and to Christian principles founded on the rock. She spoke of reeds not broken, but rather staves you could rest on and have peace, feeling confident that your talent was intrusted to a good and faithful servant, who would make it ten talents, and deserve the blessing pronounced in the Gospel, "O good and faithful servant!" Mr Boggle, the new attorney ! thought I ; but I was silent.

After dinner, Aunt Jane, at Uncle Sherbrook's request, read out two long articles from her pet religious newspaper. They gave an account of the Jesuit plot in England, and conclusively proved the end of the world had come.

It was maddening to hear Aunt Jane read aloud. She read very slowly and in a penetrating voice, and laid powerful emphasis on the doctrine and sentences she liked best. You could do nothing in the room where she was reading but try not to listen, for she hammered her words like nails into your head.

Ten o'clock came at last, and Uncle Sherbrook read prayers. He always did so in our house. My mother was afraid to read

before the Sherbrooks, because her brother-in-law looked at her seriously, and her sister declared she read too fast, and never put the right emphasis in the right place.

My mother and I were delighted to go to bed, for we were tired out.

CHAPTER V.

The day Lady Arabella's amateur concert was to take place proved very hot. Mamma scandalised Aunt Jane by announcing that she would take the grey bows off her evening dress and put them on a grey muslin morning one, as she could wear nothing warmer than a muslin. My aunt always wore her things exactly as Madame Julie Browne had made them : they were dogmas not to be tampered with. I often heard Aunt Jane say with marked disapproval, that you never could be sure where you would next see the bow that now was on Sophia's head ; perhaps it would be pinned to her shoes or stuck in her bonnet. The daring imagination which could make one bow do the duty of three was shocking in my aunt's eyes. I never could understand why—unless it was that she had a natural dislike to imagination in any form. My aunt wondered if Sophia would wear her night-cap at the concert, and tie a green ribbon round it and call it a bonnet.

“A green ribbon ! My dear Aunt Jane, mamma is still in mourning.”

“In mourning !”

It was a sight to see Aunt Jane draw back her head and shake those curls. She held the strictest and blackest doctrine on the subject of mourning, and spent half her time in jet and crape. She wore black for Uncle Sherbrook's second, third, and fourth cousins.

“Aunt Jane, for whom are you in mourning ?”

“Oh, don't you know ? Poor John Henry Stewart,” or “Poor dear Emily Sherbrook.” Very often people she had never even seen when alive.

The last two years there had been sad mortality amongst the distant Stewarts, quite an awful slaughter of Scotch relations, so that Aunt Jane's yellow stripes were as good as new. My aunt now said she would wear this dress, as she had got it for concerts and afternoon parties. I told her yellow stripes were

out of fashion, and that, besides, the top skirt wanted looping up.

“Maybe if you had two large pins, I could catch it——”

I was cut short by a “Sophy, no pinning for me!”

So Aunt Jane wore her yellow stripes without any alteration, and the bonnet to match, with the buttercups at one side, and the yellow string and the black one tied in a bow under her chin. This bonnet had also lain two years buried alive in a bandbox. I begged in vain to be allowed to alter it.

When my aunt appeared dressed for the concert, I must say she looked a very peculiar kind of zebra.

On the morning of the 23d she received a special card from Lady Arabella :—

Mr and Mrs SHERBROOK.

Lady ARABELLA SCOTT,
At home.

23d June, 5 o'clock.

The Rev. Mr Thunderbore will (*D. V.*) deliver a discourse on the Spirit of Christianity in the Turkish Harems.

Please bring your Bible and your purse.

Aunt Jane was in wonderful spirits. The truth is, she enjoyed the novelty of a little amusement, as she hardly ever allowed herself any. But she was not aware of this. On the contrary, I heard her say she would give away her ticket if she had any one to give it to. She imagined that she went to the concert and tea-party solely as a “means under Providence” for the furtherance of a good work. The sense of performing a duty cheerfully added much to her pleasure and a little to her pomposity. I might indeed say, if I spoke her own strange language, that she girded on her yellow stripes rejoicing in spirit. She went on her way with Uncle Sherbrook nearly an hour too soon.

We started so as to be in time for the first song. Mamma did not wear her pinned-up skirts and bows with her sister's light heart. She was a really shy woman, and she looked forward nervously to meeting Denis.

“If this Miss Tutterton sings, he is sure to be there,” she would repeat; “and it will be so awkward, Sophy.”

I assured her there could be no awkwardness where Denis was concerned, as he never felt awkward in his life. And what

I said turned out to be even more exactly true than I had expected.

Denis was the very first person we saw at Lady Arabella's. He happened to be standing in the small outer boudoir, which led into the drawing-room, where the concert was to take place. He met us as if he had seen us yesterday. "How do, Sophy? Got a chignon? Bought it? Haw!" He spoke in a voice which sounded new to my ears. "Aunt Sophia got a chignon too? Asked all the ladies since came home if they've got a chignon—quite the thing! Haw! no chignons out in Canada. Coming out next mail, they said—" and he rattled on about Canada, rinks, tobogginning, sleighing, and Travis, whom he had met out there. "Travis was sleighing a muffin, fellows said. If Travis does not take care, there is an old governor who'll slay him. Can't marry. Furley such a screw! Won't give him a penny!" and Denis told us stories of Lord Furley's miserly tricks. He asked a great many questions. "Haw! haw! Aunt Sophia, what do you say to that?" But he never once waited for an answer. This would-be-easy, slangy manner was that of a perfect stranger showing off his agreeability. It was strained and unnatural, and we were taken aback at finding a new acquaintance in an old friend.

My cousin escorted us from the smaller into the larger room, looked at our tickets, and found our places, talking all the time. "Rather think must leave you," said he. "Haw! Aunt Sophia, I . . . haw! . . . hope to look you up some day soon. Awfully busy. Height of the season. Every one in town. Montagu Square? . . . haw! . . . let me see . . . other side of Portman Square?"

"It is where it used to be when you were a boy, Denis," said my mother; but my cousin was gone.

We had very good seats for hearing and seeing, though rather too near the pianoforte. I spied Aunt Jane's buttercups in the distance. The Sherbrooks were facing the dais, and sat in the same row as the Clarkes. I saw two of the girls—Fanny and Louisa—and their mother, and I perceived Mr David Scott standing close by. Our seats were extra chairs arranged along the upper sides of the room, cross-corners to the rows of chairs in front of the performers. I think they were after-thoughts of Lady Arabella's charity. As there were twelve altogether,—six at one side of the room and six at the other,—I calculated they must have brought in ten guineas to the Turkish petticoats—ten, not twelve, for the arm-chair at the end of each row was reserved for the mother of one prima-donna. I

had Mrs Elmer-Elmer next me. In a few minutes Lady Tutterton appeared leaning on Denis, and was enthroned by him in the arm-chair opposite Mrs Elmer-Elmer's. The two mothers bowed the one to the other with an exaggeration of politeness.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer seemed glad to see us, though our previous acquaintance was slight. Then she could talk to me, and could not have talked to a perfect stranger; and Mrs Elmer-Elmer was a great talker,—she slipped on from one sentence to another, using many French words, and a sprinkling of Italian ones, such as *fiorette*, *crescendo*, *piano*. She spoke chiefly of her daughter's great musical genius, and of the compliments paid her by Prince Teck. She told me how jealous other ladies were of "dear Ermyntrude's" high notes, and how Signor Screecini, the celebrated singing-master, praised her magnificent voice. Mrs Elmer-Elmer was essentially a musical mother, and made the great mistake of dressing herself and her daughter operatically. She was rather silly, not exactly ill-natured, but a great gossip, and singularly transparent. She betrayed to all the world how glad she was to have had the Tecks at her house. She showed herself piqued when people forgot to add the second *Elmer* to her name. She was Mrs Elmer-Elmer. I have since found that to most people she is not herself at all, but only the mother of *that Miss Elmer who sings*. But I thoroughly realised Mrs Elmer-Elmer's individuality, and shall ever consider her to be her own peculiar self, and nobody else, or their mother or daughter either. Mrs Elmer-Elmer (I take a pleasure in repeating this name)—Mrs Elmer-Elmer's running conversation was interrupted by the Pasha's arrival. Now the Pasha was certainly himself, a regular Turk, and no mistake, for he wore his red fez. Lady Arabella leant upon his arm. I wondered her ladyship did not take this opportunity of impressing Moustapha Koustapha Bey with the elegant simplicity of the black silk petticoat. I must confess I was surprised to see her wearing a sage-green dress with salmon-coloured trimmings. I hoped his Highness would not fall in love with Lady Arabella, for it would be a sad pity were he to introduce into Turkey, a head-dress of such barbarous taste: feathers stuck out of the erection, and it looked as if it might have been made for a Pottawottamee squaw. Altogether, what a figure Lady Arabella was! She reminded me of one of those ancient missals illuminated on parchment. There was sound doctrine in her (perhaps), and a good deal of paint. The night of the Clarckes' ball, I had felt sure she wore

a false front, but I only suspected the rouge. By daylight this suspicion became a certainty.

When Lady Arabella and her Pasha had taken their places in the front row, facing the piano and raised dais, a leaf of the screen which hid the end of the room was pushed aside, and two gentlemen came forward on the platform, each holding a roll of music in a gloved hand. We looked at our programme, and saw it was an Italian duet, to be sung by the Baron von Klammerhammer and Viscount Studhorsey. "Which is the Baron?" I asked Mrs Elmer-Elmer. She told me he was the little fat old gentleman with the very bald head. "Rather *passé*, I fear," said she. "Lord Studhorsey, you have heard him? He is one of our *nouveautés*, a *débutant*. He sings quite charmingly. The other night, at my house, he and Ermyntrude sang their great *duo*, you know." Mrs Elmer-Elmer hummed an air, "*Il cuor mi batte perfido, il cuor mi trema perfida.*" A sweet—"

Miss Tutterton struck the first chord on the piano. It was she who played the accompaniment to this duet. The Baron's voice certainly had passed its prime: the lower notes were not so bad, but the upper ones were gone. When Herr von Klammerhammer took a high note, he stood on his tiptoes and raised his eyebrows and his eye-glass at the same time. I think it was with the eye-glass that he caught his upper D; he barely touched it. Lord Studhorsey, a consumptive, dark-moustachioed tenor, had nothing dashing about him but his name. The duet was well received.

"So kind of the Baron!"

"Sweet voice, Lord Studhorsey's!"

I observed to the musical mother beside me that Miss Tutterton seemed to accompany well.

"When she does accompany," said Mrs Elmer-Elmer; "generally it is the affrighted singers who have to accompany her. She keeps them in great order, I can tell you. You know what they call her?"

"No."

"The Drill-sergeant."

"The Drill-sergeant!" I was indeed amazed. "She is not like a drill-sergeant, except . . . except perhaps," I could not help adding, "when she stares through her eye-glass."

"Exactly!" said Mrs Elmer-Elmer.

We next had a trio from Miss Tutterton, the Baron, and his small lordship, with Madame Scratchowitz, that talented Pole, at the piano. The Drill-sergeant led in style, and the trio was

a decided success. Had I not listened, I could yet have told this by the gracious smiles of the mother opposite. Her rival next me whispered something about *fioreture* not in time. Still she applauded, informing me that she made a point of applauding any song in which Miss Tutterton took a part.

“People say such things! They are so jealous themselves, you know.”

Then came another trio, the performers being Miss Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer, the Herr, and the Viscount. The soprano held a high note for several bars, while the bass rang the changes on “*Vecchio genitor*” and the tenor repeated “*Amor del mio cuor-or-or.*” There was great clapping. Even the ladies clapped with three fingers of the right hand on the palm of the left. Lady Tutterton did not join in the general applause: having unfortunately dropped her programme, she was occupied in picking it up. The soprano’s mamma remarked to me that dear Ermyntrude had a slight cold, and I said what I felt I was expected to say—“Your daughter is in charming voice. Quite a treat to hear her, I do assure you.” Mrs Elmer-Elmer touched me on the shoulder with her fan, and whispered that Ermyntrude’s solo would indeed be a treat. “Only”—she put up her finger—“hush! it is not in the programme! Lady Arabella dared not, because of the other. Jealousy, Miss Thursley—jealousy! It is sad, too sad, people should be so jealous of my poor Ermyntrude. I cannot understand it. Jealousy, Miss Thursley, is the strangest passion of the human heart.”

While this wise mother was thus moralising, the two gentlemen singers had disappeared. They had earned a rest. Miss Tutterton and Madame Scratchowitz alone remained on the dais. “The other” evidently intended giving us a solo. Mrs Elmer-Elmer did not perceive this, being quite taken up with her own admirable reflections on the human heart; so that Miss Tutterton’s first note gave her a shock, and drew from her an exclamation of amazement. She could not stifle her sudden surprise. A “Hush! hush!” was heard through the room, and Mrs Elmer-Elmer became as red as Aunt Jane in an argument. She cast indignant eyes at Lady Arabella, but her ladyship appeared quite absorbed in the charming music. The Pasha yawned: this I considered inexcusable; for the song, though perhaps a trifle too severely classical for a Turk, was tastefully sung. The rival mothers shot glances at each other.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer soon recovered her composure, and was able to join in the “sweetly prettys,” “too delightfuls,” and

“brava-bravas,” with which the company around us greeted the Drill-sergeant’s *motif* in B flat. I am no judge, but I thought Miss Tutterton had very great musical talent, and you could tell in what language she sang. To my mind, all she wanted to be a good singer was a voice; but I am told you don’t want a voice nowadays, and that some of the best amateurs sing exquisitely, and are immensely admired, in fact adored, in their own set, and yet have positively no voice at all.

Aunt Jane afterwards told me she could hardly hear a note of Miss Tutterton’s song where she sat. For this reason there was not much enthusiasm at the more distant end of the room. Then the audience was mixed. Miss Tutterton’s own musical set, I have since been told, would have clapped whether they heard her or not.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer informed me in an audible whisper that whenever Ermyntrude sang that particular song it was encored.

Miss Tutterton stepped down from the dais, and standing by her mother’s arm-chair, received the congratulations of Lady Arabella and other admirers. Denis appeared on the scene, and seemed to pay very pleasing compliments. He then seemed to be taking leave, and I overheard “Furley, Tattersall’s.” He left the room, giving us a wave of the hand as he passed.

We were now in the midst of the ten minutes’ interval between the first part and the second. Ices were handed to the Pasha; he ate three, and stopped yawning. They were then taken round to the rest of the company. When you had eaten your ice, a waiter asked for a shilling. This little circumstance created visible surprise, and recalled to our minds the fact that we were assisting at a work of charity.

My mother wondered what was coming next. She had not spoken for some time; our meeting with Denis had silenced her. We studied the programme, and found Miss Tutterton would not sing again till she took part in the grand finale, a quartett:—

Miss Elmer-Elmer.
Baron von Klammerhammer.
Viscount Studhorsey.
Miss Tutterton.

I observed the singers’ names were placed alphabetically, even the gentlemen’s. This is most unusual; but I considered the precaution a wise one, for I began to perceive that amongst musical geniuses there are firsts, but no lasts.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer in a flutter of excitement told me the time for Emyntrude's solo had now arrived. A few minutes elapsed, and then Miss Elmer-Elmer came from behind the screen and walked forwards with her eyes cast down and a blush on her cheek. She was a singularly modest, and even timid-looking girl. She had very fair hair and a pretty face. The conversation ceased. The Pasha brightened suddenly. I daresay his Highness had but few fair wives. Programmes rustled. The hum of expectation died away. There was silence. A voice near us whispered, "Look at Miss Tutterton." These words were not Mrs Elmer-Elmer's—she sat engrossed, I might say enraptured, in her daughter. The whisper vibrated in the stillness. I noticed others perceived it besides me, and more eyes than mine were turned towards the "Drill-sergeant." She stood with her eye-glass fixed on her rival; her lips were parted: it seemed as if the whole passion of her nature, and the whole jealousy of her soul, were concentrated and cocked in one eye.

As to Lady Tutterton, she trembled with indignation. I wondered how Lady Arabella could smilingly ignore her frowns.

Miss Elmer's was a beautiful voice—clear and high; it filled the room. She gave us an Italian *bravura* song full of difficult passages: just the thing, perhaps I should say just the trash, for a mixed audience. She ran up and down the scale, and took high notes like a Titiens or a Patti. I should say Miss Elmer had more voice than genius, while Miss Tutterton had more genius than voice. These two distinguished amateurs were so unlike, that jealousy need never have come between them.

When "dear Emyntrude's" wonderful *roulades* were encored, Mrs Elmer-Elmer could not conceal her enchantment. The applause intended for the daughter was instinctively acknowledged by the mother.

The encore proved too much for the Tuttertons' nerves. The runs so enthusiastically received by the audience irritated these ladies. "Mere *solfeggi*," escaped her ladyship's compressed lips, and raised a smile around her. Miss Elmer's high notes seemed to shake the poor "Drill-sergeant's" eye-glass. She fidgeted with this glass, and put it up and put it down, and took off one glove to fix it better. Her bare hand was covered by the blushes which reddened her very forehead.

Before the run at the end of Miss Elmer-Elmer's song had quite ceased, Lady Arabella left her chair, evidently overflowing with congratulations for "my most charming soprano and her very excellent mother." To our astonishment, the Pasha was

wide awake, and rose also and walked after her ladyship. His Highness said something, doubtless in French. Lady Arabella turned her back to Mrs Elmer-Elmer, and crossed the open space in front of the piano—the Pasha following. Lady Tutterton stood up; Miss Tutterton advanced. It was clear to all the company that his Highness Moustapha Koustapha Bey had requested to be introduced to Lady Tutterton and her accomplished daughter. The Pasha (dreadful old Turk!) stopped suddenly, and exclaimed, loud enough for us to hear him, “*Non, non, miladi ! pas celle-ci, mais l'autre !*” intimating only too clearly which soprano he admired. Lady Arabella had misunderstood her “*marquis turc.*”

Miss Elmer-Elmer, in the act of retiring behind the screen, was stopped by our flurried hostess. The Pasha mounted the dais; and there, in the sight of all, the presentation took place like a part of the programme. The honour was undoubtedly great. The prima-donna received it quietly enough: still the fine speeches of the Turk were pleasant. Mrs Elmer-Elmer must have considered the Pasha an admirable judge of Italian music, or she would not have shown such delighted elation at the compliments his Highness paid her daughter. As to the Tuttertons, they betrayed a pique which could only have sprung from envy at not being admired by so distinguished a *maestro*.

I heard Moustapha Koustapha beg Miss Elmer-Elmer for another song. She tried to refuse. The Pasha appealed to Lady Arabella, and her ladyship’s perplexity amused me. She looked nervously at the Tuttertons. Miss Elmer’s eyes followed hers. The two ladies appeared to understand each other, and it seemed most unlikely the Pasha would gain his point. He did so by tapping on the piano and announcing, as he turned towards the audience, that “*Mademoiselle Elmer veut bien avoir la complaisance de nous chanter un solo.*” This was received with great applause, and the unwilling favourite was obliged to take her seat at the piano. She sang an Irish melody to her own accompaniment.

In the middle of her song the Tuttertons got up and left the room. They walked in front of the dais, right between the singer and the audience. Miss Elmer nearly broke down. Every one stared, turned round, and whispered. Lady Tutterton went first; the “Drill-sergeant” followed at sufficient distance to allow her mother’s long skirt its full swing. The indignant insulted ladies rustled as they moved. Truly there was a magnificent dignity about them, which might have been sublime had it not been ridiculous. Their departure caused a

sensation. Lady Arabella almost changed colour, notwithstanding her rouge. Even Mrs Elmer-Elmer's attention was drawn away from her daughter's voice ; she whispered to me, "My Lady Tuttut ! so like her !"

When Miss Elmer left the piano, the Baron von Klammerhammer and Madame Scratchowitz took her place. This Pole, half amateur, half artist, was said to be a countess in disguise, and the Emperor of Russia's personal enemy. Perhaps the Czar dislikes long sonatas. Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron (indefatigable genius !) played an endless sonata by Moscheles. It is the only sonata by that composer I have ever heard, and I must say it bored me. This dreary work seemed to be written by a learned musician in search of an idea which he never found. Lady Arabella smiled, and nodded, and kept time with the music all through the five movements ; and when at last—at long last—the sonata ended, her ladyship cried aloud, "How charmingly Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron have rendered the spirit of the great composer !" The Pasha, to whom this remark was addressed, had unfortunately fallen asleep. Lady Arabella looked annoyed. She sent a servant for the ices ; on a sign from his mistress the footman rattled the tray. His Highness did not awake till the third rattle ; perhaps he dreamt the first two were learned variations in the sonata.

The quartett, "*Luna, crudel' luna*," could not be given without Miss Tutterton, so Lord Studhorsey and Miss Elmer-Elmer sang a duet instead—"Diva che tradisce." A trio was not attempted, because it was well known the Baron von Klammerhammer never could catch his high notes with his tiptoes and his eye-glass unless he had practised the thing beforehand. Lady Arabella put on her heavy gold spectacles, and herself volunteered to accompany the duet. Every one considered this "too delightful ! Lady Arabella ! Her own self ! Really this is too kind !" And so it was ; but I could not help thinking it would have been still kinder to the singers had Lady Arabella remained quietly beside her Pasha. She played many wrong notes. Lord Studhorsey became nervous and lost his place. Miss Elmer-Elmer's great shake was spoilt by an accompaniment in a false key. Her mother touched me on the shoulder and threw up her eyes.

Strange to say, this fiasco elicited enthusiastic applause. Lady Arabella wished for an encore. Miss Elmer and Lord Studhorsey pleaded exhaustion and loss of voice. We could hear the little controversy from where we sat. The audience

did not encore ; on the contrary, many people stood up as if anxious to leave. Lady Arabella was suffering from a peculiar kind of sore throat, or I am sure she would have sung herself. She was at length persuaded to shut up her music and step down from the piano. The Pasha awaited her. His Highness was introduced to Madame Scratchowitz and Mrs Elmer-Elmer (delightful moment !) Then the two distinguished patrons of an admirable charity left the room arm in arm, accompanied by the Polish countess and Mrs Elmer-Elmer and her daughter. The Baron followed with the sonata under his arm. Lord Studhorsey carried a roll of loose music.

The 'Morning Post,' in an interesting paragraph next day, said that on the conclusion of this most successful concert, Lady Arabella Scott entertained at afternoon tea his Highness Moustapha Koustapha Bey Pasha, cousin of the Sultan, the distinguished amateur performers, and a select circle. The Rev. Mr Thunderbore gave a lucid discourse on the Spirit of Christianity in the Turkish Harems.

It was late when the Sherbrooks came home. Aunt Jane was pleased with the concert and edified by the tea-party. She was amazed to find there were so many humble-minded, self-denying, admirable Christians in Turkey. The Rev. Mr Thunderbore had wellnigh convinced my aunt there were no Mohammedans left in the Sultan's dominions. I asked if the Pasha showed any surprise at what he heard, but was told the Pasha went away before the Christian address. The Elmer-Elmers, Madame Scratchowitz, the Baron, and Lord Studhorsey, had also left at the same time. Aunt Jane informed us the funds of the charity did not suffer from their early departure, as Lady Arabella, by Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's advice, had told Mr Thunderbore to make his collection first and his speech afterwards.

My mother and I were indeed surprised by the many entirely new facts about the Turks' spiritual natures which Aunt Jane had picked up at the afternoon tea. I said so to my aunt. She was much pleased, and hoped I too had learnt some new fact that day. I answered that I had. "Yes, Aunt Jane, I have learnt there exists a hatred even stronger than that of truly pious people for all piety but their own, and this strongest passion is the hatred one musical genius feels towards another ; it extends even to two generations of them that play or sing."

CHAPTER VI.

We all happened to be out one afternoon a few days after Lady Arabella's concert. Upon our return, there was a card lying on the hall table, which gave quite a shock to Aunt Jane's system, and even scandalised my mother. It was Denis's card, with Miss Tutterton's name written just under his own printed one. This new way of announcing an engagement was cordially condemned: my mother hated anything fast, and Aunt Jane spoke many words in season about the degenerate ways of modern society.

When Uncle Sherbrook came in and was shown the card (with due explanation), he, too, almost joined in the outcry. He did not say much, but he did not differ from what was said.

As I listened to them all, I thought a new sin was born into the world; no old-established sin could be half so shocking. I have often remarked how infinitely more shocking a new sin, however tiny, is than an old one—and doubtless because it shows the devil is still inventing.

Scandalised as Aunt Jane might be at the manner of Miss Tutterton's visit, she nevertheless thought we ought immediately to return her call. Now mamma and Aunt Jane held different views on the subject of visiting. My aunt loved to find her friends at home, and to pitch her tent under their roof, like a nomad who has at last found rest for the sole of her foot. My mother, on the contrary, chose a very fine day, and called just at the hour she knew people went out driving. Visits would hang over her like black clouds. She was impatient by nature, and longed to kill off her friends quickly.

We had three wet days, which were a sad trial to her.

"Now, Sophia," said Aunt Jane each day, "if I were you I should return Miss Tutterton's visit, and call on Lady Arabella. You would have a chance of finding them at home."

"It is too soon, Jane—too soon."

But when the sun came out again, mamma declared she had already delayed far too long in paying those visits.

"I have told you so over and over again, Sophia."

"And you were right, Jane."

"Yes, Sophia, I was right; I know I was."

My aunt felt so pleased at her infallibility being recognised, that she announced her intention, much to our disgust, of accompanying us on a visiting tour that very afternoon. She

generally went upon her campaigns alone with Uncle Sherbrook. They suited each other. We looked forward unhappily to the slow tortures awaiting us, and my mother ordered a fly, with a failing heart, though it was a fine day, and there were hopes our friends would not be at home.

People thought it strange the Sherbrooks never would bring up their own carriage for the season to London, and wondered their horses did not eat themselves to death in the country. I expect, when my uncle and aunt were away, Robert Jones, the coachman, mixed a little sound doctrine, or something else, with the pure oats, and thus saved their lives. Aunt Jane would not for the world that Robert Jones came to London and associated with other grooms and coachmen. "The grooms of a great metropolis? The most godless of men! For they are corrupted on race-courses, and lead a life of undisguised depravity, ignoring too often the very elements of religion." So Robert Jones stayed at Sherbrook, and was reported to spend his spare time in teaching the Church Catechism to the stable-boy. An admirable and pious coachman is an edifying piece of creation, though he may drive slowly; but an admirable and pious lady's-maid is the most perfect work of . . . Satan. Aunt Jane kept a model household.

I must say I myself used to think it would be pleasanter for my aunt to drive about comfortably in her own carriage than in a melancholy one-horse fly. Besides, to my mind, a little depravity would have done Robert no harm. It might have enlivened him, and the stable-boy could have learnt the Catechism at the Sunday-school. Most decidedly, I should have risked Robert's morals in the great metropolis! Then I hated shut-up flies, especially when I sat with my back to the horse. I should greatly have preferred driving in my coffin with the lid off. The fly is the coffin with the lid on.

Aunt Jane was afraid of draughts, so we kept the windows up that afternoon, and jogged on slowly as if to the grave. My mother looked like a mute. My aunt was more lively, and wore the yellow stripes, and the bonnet to match.

We snailed first to the Clarckes. The tedious, despairing motion of a creeping carriage is like that of a snail who goes through life crawling—crawling with his shell behind him. The Clarckes were out. Aunt Jane discussed the family as we snailed towards Lady Arabella's house. She wondered the Miss Clarckes had not better manners, for they had been most sensibly brought up, and Lady Clarke had intrusted their education to a well-informed Christian lady of a certain age, and yet

my aunt was deeply grieved to say they were very fast. The two eldest were loud in their manners, and Louisa, the youngest, had a reprehensible flirting something about her—a “je ne sais quor,” as my aunt called it. Aunt Jane felt shocked whenever Louisa spoke to Mr Scott. She had sat next the Clarckes at Lady Arabella’s concert.

The pretty, happy face I had seen at the ball, rose up before me, and I awoke from the half-sea-sick torpor which invariably overcomes me when I am driving backwards in a coffin with the lid on. I fired up, and took Louisa’s part. My aunt had shifted her ground. She was now finding fault with Mr Scott’s manners. I defended him also. Aunt Jane expressed surprise: she observed I was so placed at the concert that I could not possibly know anything of Mr Scott’s demeanour, or of Louisa Clarke’s either. This was true. Had Aunt Jane stopped when she made this remark, I should have been ignobly silenced; but she diverged to flirting in general. She spoke of the sin with her accustomed severity. She declared no right-feeling, truly Christian gentleman ever flirted with the lady he admired; or if he did, it was the lady’s own fault.

“Your uncle *never* flirted with me!”

My aunt shook her curls; the bonnet and the buttercups shook also.

“Your uncle *never* flirted with me!”

This was said with an air of perfect, perfect propriety!

I sat opposite my aunt, so the ludicrous expression of her countenance could not escape me. It proved too much for my gravity. I burst into a fit of laughter. My mother laughed with me. Aunt Jane could not imagine what amused us. She seemed to consider my laughter to be the outward sign of inward depravity—the bubbling of the hidden well of vanity and of the waters of vice.

“Sophia, you encourage the child,” said she solemnly, in nowise affected by our merriment; “you encourage the child, while it ought to be your duty to impress her with the sad and serious evils flirting invariably . . .”

I discovered the carriage was standing still. I don’t think we had moved for a minute, but no wonder we did not perceive the snailing had come to an end. I had my hand on the door, delighted to hop out, ring the bell, and skip the sermon. Aunt Jane stopped me.

“Sophy,” she said, “you had better recover some composure and dignity of manner before you offer yourself to the observant gaze of footmen.”

So Aunt Jane got out of the carriage herself, and walked up the steps slowly, and rang the bell beside Lady Arabella's hall-door. It is a pity there was no one in the street to see her; for, as Uncle Sherbrook loves to say, little things are not little things if they are done like great ones.

My mother looked at her watch, and found it was still early. She began to fear the Tuttertons would be at home; dread of the eye-glass quite sobered her. I suggested a visit to the Elmer-Elmers. We had not left a card there this season. Mamma jumped at the idea, and begged me not to lose a moment in telling the coachman to drive there next.

"And tell him he is to go there first, and he is not to follow any directions Mrs Sherbrook may give him."

I put my head out of the window (not at the pavement side), and gave mamma's order to the drowsy old fly-driver. He did not grasp the order until I had repeated it three times. I was afraid Aunt Jane might return while I was merely a skirt in the carriage and a body outside. But she still stood, the picture of dignity, at Lady Arabella's door. The black-coated butler stood opposite in the hall, a pendant picture of influential dignity.

"Aunt Jane," I said, "is inquiring when the King of the Cannibal Islands is going to eat his missionary. Lady Arabella is sure to know."

When at last my aunt's flounces before, and straight stripes behind, and black lace shawl, were resettled in the carriage, we perceived that our dear relation was seriously upset. Something must have happened which touched her personal feelings more than a poor white eaten, or going to be eaten, by the blacks.

Now I felt convinced by this time that the only chance there is of surviving a drive in a coffin, lies in keeping the mind excited or amused. So in hopes of an *argument*, or a ludicrous little word in season, I began wondering if Lady Arabella were really not at home. I had fixed on the irritated nerve.

"*Not at home* means in London," said Aunt Jane, "that you are not in the house; and in the country it means that you are neither in the house, nor in the garden, nor yet walking on the front or on the back avenue: but *not at home* never can mean you are in the house, but engaged, or waiting for your carriage."

"Yet it does mean that, Aunt Jane."

"Then it is a fib! It is more—it is a lie, child; and liars have their place in the burning lake. It is an invention of Satan!"

"And the very best thing Satan ever invented!" cried I; "for it enables one to get rid of all the tiresome people!"

This was the beginning of an enlivening tiff between my aunt and me.

It seems, when Aunt Jane asked for Lady Arabella, the butler said, "Not at home. Her ladyship is going out driving." This answer shocked my aunt, for she said, "Lady Arabella is not a woman of the world who would authorise her servants to deviate from the truth."

This is a short account plucked from the very long and branching one given us by Aunt Jane. My aunt announced her serious intention of writing to Lady Arabella. "Her servants follow the practice so common in ungodly households; and by saying not at home when you are at home, they systematically disregard the sacredness of truth. Lady Arabella would be deeply grieved, and I will write and tell her."

"Jane," said my mother, "remember Lady Arabella's concert is over, so she may not be as anxious to receive her friends now as she was earlier in the season. She has no more tickets to dispose of."

Our arrival at the Elmers' house put an end to the "argument," just as we had a right to expect a reviving explosion from Aunt Jane.

Astonishment of my aunt! "This is not the Tuttertons'! Why, we are at the Elmer-Elmers'!" Explanations from my mother.

"Mrs Elmer-Elmer is at home, miss."

"You need not mind coming in, Jane, unless you like," says my mother. But Aunt Jane does like to come in.

We are shown up-stairs, into a boudoir next the great music-room. Miss Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer can be heard practising *roulades*. In comes Mrs Elmer-Elmer: good-natured, kindly in her manners; frightful in her dress. Her caps were turbans, and she loved glass beads. She was not aware that she dressed peculiarly; indeed she was for ever giving my mother her milliner's direction in Paris—Madame Josephine, Place de l'Opéra, numéro 20. I remember it as that of a woman to be avoided.

We were not seated before Aunt Jane had mentioned the concert. Mrs Elmer-Elmer seized the glorious opportunity with eager delight, and we had the secret history of the two solos. "Lady Arabella might have told Ermyntrude; *she* would not have been jealous. But the Drill-sergeant! you see she could not trust the Drill-sergeant!"

Aunt Jane did not know whom the Drill-sergeant possibly

could be. Mrs Elmer-Elmer explained at some length what I already knew—that the Drill-sergeant meant Miss Tutterton. We had the why and the wherefore of this, it would appear, not quite undeserved nickname.

Aunt Jane remarked that jealousy was an all-devouring flame burning up the heart of man. Mrs Elmer-Elmer assented to this in a reverent manner. I am sure she thought Aunt Jane had quoted a verse from the Bible. My aunt is at times so eminently Scriptural in her language that it would require an archbishop to decide if her texts are Gospel or not.

“Very true, Mrs Sherbrook—very true. Jealousy burneth man’s heart, and woman’s also. Signor Screecini used to say (he was Ermyntrude’s singing-master, but he never spoke Italian to her, as she only understands it when she sings)—he said to her, ‘*Mademoiselle, souvenez-vous que l’alouette n’aime point la fauvette.*’”

“Translate that, Sophy,” whispered my aunt.

“One lady pecks another,” said I.

“This saying of Signor Sere—of your daughter’s singing-master,” remarked Aunt Jane, “is no doubt one of the popular sayings of Italy, and, like the proverbs so common in Spain, and indeed like most, if not all, the wisdom of the West, I dare-say it is clearly traceable to the East, for the lost tribes of Israel spread—”

But Mrs Elmer-Elmer was a match for Aunt Jane. She had easy transitions of her own—twists and turns in a maze where there is only one door out. The one topic Mrs Elmer cared to discuss was amateur singers and their music. She dismissed the lost tribes of Israel with a “Most interesting, Mrs Sherbrook!—most interesting! The Israelites were a wonderful people.”

“And undoubtedly inspired,” put in my aunt.

“Inspired and wonderful! but believe me, Mrs Sherbrook, there is no world so wonderful as the musical world! The stories I could tell you. . . .” And she did tell us stories: little huffy bickerings of an amateur chorus; war declared between rival mothers; great hatreds of great sopranos—“dear Ermyntrude is quite devoid of such feelings!”—spiteful tricks of small tenors, for it would seem the singing man is often a meaner bird than the singing woman. All this was quite new to me, and amusing, and I was delighted we had slipped away from the Israelites and the wisdom of the West. Oh that ‘Wisdom of the West and Ethics of the East’! Oft-quoted book! its very name bored me.

Mrs Elmer-Elmer continued to talk on with much fluency, quite undisturbed by Aunt Jane's irrelevant remarks. She did not silence her; but however digressive my aunt's observations might be, Mrs Elmer made stepping-stones of them, and forded the stream in the direction she wished to go. I think she did this instinctively, without reflecting.

I noticed the piano had stopped. Miss Ermyntrude came into the room. I was glad to see her, for I thought my poor mother would now have some one to talk to. Mamma never could get in a word with Aunt Jane, unless she talked at the same time as her sister. This she considered bad manners; so the dear creature was buried alive when she went visiting with my aunt. She sat silent on a chair, like an ornamental mummy.

Miss Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer entered just as her mother was dilating on the most favourite part of her favourite topic—the mad jealousy all the musical mothers in London betrayed of dear Ermyntrude. “You saw Lady Tutterton?—Lady Tuttut, as they call her!—you saw her at Lady Arabella's, flounce out of the room, and the Drill-sergeant after her? The Chevalier de Clairon once said to me, when the Tuttertons positively walked over Ermyntrude at a *soirée musicale*, ‘*Madame Elmer-Elmer regardez un peu! Le caporal suit le tambour-major! Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre! Mon Dieu! c'est beau à voir!*’ The Chevalier is an *attaché* to the French embassy.”

“*Mong Dieu!*” repeated Aunt Jane in a low voice of horror; “how shocking! The Chevalier is a Papist, I fear.”

“No, he is a baritone!” cried Mrs Elmer, evidently not realising what Aunt Jane said. “French baritones are sometimes a little hard, but he is a charming singer. The Chevalier won't sing with Miss Tutterton. He only sings with Ermyntrude.”

“Then,” said I, “Miss Tutterton has to content herself with the Baron von Klammerhammer and Lord Studhorsey.”

“When she can get them, *ma petite!*” exclaimed Mrs Elmer, triumphantly. “Lord Studhorsey greatly prefers singing with Ermyntrude. It is true the Baron—poor man!—sings with whoever will have him;—*passé!* decidedly *passé!*”

Mrs Elmer-Elmer then explained to us that hardly any one worth hearing sings with any one else. Lord George Warbattle likes to sing his Spanish solo, though no one cares to listen to a bass. He hates singing second to Lord Studhorsey. Lord Studhorsey cannot bear the rival tenor, Mr Reginald Meltem;

and Miss Tutterton declares Mr Meltem has no method, though there are ladies who admire his voice. I began to consider a duet the direct result of a miracle.

“Method is everything with Miss Tutterton,” continued Mrs Elmer-Elmer; “and no wonder she thinks more of method than of voice! Miss Tutterton is well taught, my dear Mrs Sherbrook—very well taught. Positively no natural organ! Now Mr Reginald Meltem is all voice; great sentiment, I do assure you! I . . .” dropping her voice—“I cannot say I quite like to hear him sing ‘*t'amo*’ with my daughter. Lord Studhorsay has a better ear for time.”

I looked at Miss Ermyntrude to see if she enjoyed the conversation of her mother. I could not see her face, for her head was turned away. She had risen, saying, “There is a draught, Mrs Thursley,” and had beckoned mamma to a chair at the other side of the room.

So far, my mother had shown unnatural patience; but when she got up at Miss Elmer’s request, she seemed to think the opportunity of giving Aunt Jane a hint to say good-bye was not to be lost. “Really, Mrs Elmer-Elmer,” she said—“now really, I cannot sit down again. We have paid you a visitation. Come, Jane, we have——” Aunt Jane finished her sentence—“another visit to pay to the Lady Tutterton you have been speaking of, Mrs Elmer-Elmer, because her daughter is engaged to my nephew.”

The musical mother started up with unfeigned surprise.

“Lady Tutterton! and you never told me, Mrs Sherbrook! and the way I have talked! Excuse me, excuse me! And the Drill . . . A thousand pardons! Miss Tutterton is engaged to your nephew! Ermyntrude! Ermyntrude! Miss Tutterton is going to be married!”

“To be married?” repeated Miss Elmer, in incredulous amazement.

“Yes, to be married,” said Aunt Jane, “and to my nephew, Denis Rigardy-Wrenstone.” My aunt said this with that air of satisfaction which she invariably assumes when she announces a wedding, even if she does not approve of the match. Aunt Jane likes telling any piece of news.

“Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, how you do astonish me! A good match, I suppose?” inquired Mrs Elmer, eagerly.

“In a worldly point of view, it is a good one,” replied my aunt: the heavenly point of view was a matter of mental reservation. “About five thousand a-year,” continued Aunt Jane; “and indeed, if he would take Edward’s advice——”

"Five thousand a-year, Ermyntrude! No profession, I suppose?" Is he handsome, Mrs Sherbrook?"

"There is a levity," sighed Aunt Jane, "and a carnal——"

"Oh, but, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, has he a fine figure and a good-looking face? Miss Thursley, you will know—is he handsome?"

"Decidedly," I said.

"Wonderful, I declare, Ermyntrude—wonderful!"

Miss Elmer said nothing. She had recovered from her first surprise. She is a sweet, amiable creature, and would not say an unkind word of any one. Her silence showed me that the most charitable act one amateur singer can do towards another, is to hold her tongue when the rival soprano's name is mentioned.

"Allow me to congratulate you, Mrs Thursley," exclaimed Mrs Elmer, politely; "charming niece—charming niece, Mrs Thursley!"

My mother muttered something, in which "Thank you" and "Good-bye" were mixed up together. She shook hands and went down-stairs.

Aunt Jane, as usual, loitered behind at the drawing-room door. She never could take leave in one farewell. For a wonder, I lingered with her. I am generally greatly bored by long visits; yet I was in no hurry to go, for the musical mother had amused me. My curiosity was excited as I heard Mrs Elmer-Elmer say, "Never for a moment did I guess such a thing; and I don't know what I might not have said, Mrs Sherbrook. I was on the very point of telling you——"

"Oh, what, Mrs Elmer-Elmer?" I cried. "Was it about Lady Tutterton? Don't mind; do tell the story. I am sure it is delightful."

So with a little pressing (it did not require much!) Mrs Elmer gave us a description of the way Miss Tutterton stood up at the Warbattles' *at home*, and "interpreted—that is the correct word, Mrs Sherbrook—interpreted classical music for the space of ten minutes. You would have thought they were twenty, Miss Thursley. She has positively no organ! There is method, if you like—and too much of it, Mrs Sherbrook, for my taste. When Miss Tutterton finished her song—her interpretation, I mean—up gets Miss Julia Horston. They call her Hoarsetone—no body in her voice! Now what do you think happened?"

Aunt Jane was going to guess, but Mrs Elmer continued her story: "Sir Horace Tutterton (Sir Hoightly-Toightly, they call him), he is as blind as a bat—just like his daughter! He put

up his eye-glass, and I suppose he stuck it in the wrong eye, for he said to Lady Tutterton, 'That is Miss Elmer-Elmer. She is going to sing.' 'Oh!' cries my lady, 'then I'll be off.' And she is in such a fuss, she does not even look to see who it is. Amelia Meltem was sitting right behind her, and heard her say, 'Then I'll be off;' and Amelia told Ermyntrude. But it seems, just as Tuttut was leaving her seat, Sir Hoightly-Toightly put up his eye-glass, and this time in the right eye. 'Oh no, it is not she,' he says; 'it is only Miss Horston.' So my lady sat down, and there she stayed till Ermyntrude really did begin her *Taci taci cattivo cuore*—a sweet thing; and then Tuttut walked off in the middle of the *diminuendo*, and spoilt the whole effect."

I was glad I had waited behind for this little story. Any tale which one musical mother tells of another is worth listening to, for it is told with such lively delight.

My mother and I sat silent in our coffin as we went snailing towards the Tuttertons' house in Lowndes Square. Aunt Jane talked on as usual. I just put in a "yes! ah! oh! indeed!" every now and then, for the sake of good manners, but I did not listen to her. At last my mother did speak. She looked nervously at Aunt Jane, then gazed out of the window, cleaned the glass with the window-strap, and began, "Jane—"

"Really, Sophia, I can't hear you if you turn away your head and whisper."

"Jane—I—I think it is too late to go to the Tuttertons' this evening. We can go any other day."

"Too late, Sophia? Why, it is just the right time to find them at home, and I am particularly anxious to meet Lady Tutterton."

"But you will not ask for her, Jane?" cried my mother.

"I will, Sophia. Edward and I know what good manners are, and possibly Lady Tutterton does not."

Aunt Jane told us she and "Edward" agreed in thinking Lady Tutterton ought to have accompanied her daughter and Denis on their visit; her card, at least, should have been left by Miss Tutterton.

I must say the Infallibles were right. "If Lady Tutterton," continued my aunt, sublimely—"if Lady Tutterton does not know the rules of society, I will teach them to her."

My mother was overawed by Aunt Jane, and gave up the discussion as hopeless. I cannot say she resigned herself to the Tuttertons and fate. She was no more resigned than the nervous beings are resigned who fidget in a dentist's waiting-

room. Mamma's discomfort was rather amusing to behold I smiled, and yet I pitied her.

Aunt Jane's tongue had the carriage all to itself till we drew up at the Tuttertons' hall-door. When my aunt saw we had arrived, she turned to my mother, and said, with the air of a person who thinks herself clever and satirical, "You need not come in unless you wish, Sophia"—thus throwing back like a shuttlecock the words mamma had said to her at the Elmers' door. Aunt Jane would act the part of footman in her own dignified person. I fancy she was not quite certain whether she might trust me to ask if the Tuttertons really were at home. An unsound imagination like Sophy's she would consider up to any sly trick.

My aunt beckoned to us to leave our coffin and come in. She herself walked into the hall slowly and demurely, as a lady of her importance should. Her back was turned. I had my foot on the carriage-step. A sudden impulse seized me: "Shall we leave her and drive home?" A moment's hesitation, and then: "Yes, yes," cries my mother; "and quickly, Sophy—quickly!"

As we turned into the Park, I saw it was just six by the clock. To our dismay we found a great crowd of carriages. A mounted policeman became very angry with our puzzle-headed coachman. Our fly was not allowed to cross towards the naked Achilles. On the contrary, we were ordered into a line of carriages, and forced to go in the direction of Albert Gate. Our feelings were not pleasant. We should be blocked in the carriage-jam for the next hour! Aunt Jane's visit would be finished; she would be kept waiting for the fly. We began to repent. But our repentance was soon put an end to by the unlooked-for intelligence of our driver. A quickly trotting policeman rode down the ranks, and the Princess of Wales drove after him. Our coachman turned round behind her Royal Highness's landau; and thus, completely protected from the excitable keeper of the peace, we managed to cut into the carriages at the opposite side of the road. A brougham followed our example. Just as the horse turned in behind us, there came a block down the rank. Everything stood still; so the brougham itself remained jutting out into the policeman's and Princess's highway. When the Royal carriage had passed Apsley Gate, up cantered the head-constable. The row of carriages outside ours began to move again. The outraged official stopped the latter end of that row. He ordered our carriage to cross into the empty space, and the brougham took our place in the inner line.

There were a great many riders at the end of Rotten Row. Now as we had no Aunt Jane with us, I kept down the window at my side of the coffin, and amused myself by looking out. I sat next the riders. I looked for the Clarckes, and thought perhaps I might see Louisa and Mr Scott again, and I wondered if Louisa flirted on horseback. There was time enough for wondering at my ease. We would drive about a yard, and then come to a stop; and then move again, and stop again; and so on, step by step, and stop by stop. Ladies who have riding admirers attached to their carriage-side, may perhaps spend a pleasant twenty minutes while stepping and stopping at the end of Rotten Row, but I found it dull work. There was a carriage drawn up by the Row, out of the drive. As we approached it, I noticed, from behind, that the coachman wore a curly white wig, and the footman powdered. We pulled up beside this carriage. There was a riding admirer attached to it. My face looked out of the middle of our window, framed like Toby in a Punch-box. The grand carriage contained only one lady and two pug-dogs. The riding admirer being turned towards the lady, it so happened that we came face to face. I felt him look at me. I looked at him. I saw it was Denis. He did not seem to know me; still I felt he knew me. He did not touch his hat, nor yet turn away. He cut me dead, as the saying is. His cool composure was such, that no one but I myself could have told he was cutting me. I did not bow, not wishing to dishonour him with an acquaintance I felt he would fain ignore, in the presence of a lady of fashion and two pug-dogs. I drew back my head, and thought I had seen enough of the world for one day. My cousin's conduct wounded me. I thought him a coward—a mean worshipper of flash.

Now that I know more of the world, I am less severe. I should expect my best friend to cut me if I drove in a rattle-trap between Knightsbridge and Grosvenor Gate. My friend might perhaps recognise me by the Powder Magazine, if he or she were deeply attached to me. I instantly determined not to tell my mother we had just passed Denis, and that he had looked at me and cut me. I thought it would hurt her.

During the first ten minutes of our reprieve, my mother was a lively sinner. She evidently felt herself to be quite an independent, headstrong character. "Not a bit afraid of your Aunt Jane!"

However, the stoppages in Hyde Park cooled her spirits, like penal servitude. "I was a little nervous, Sophy. I am not generally shy, my dear, as you know."

Certainly I knew the contrary.

"There is something about that Miss Tutterton which makes me shy. Perhaps it is her eye-glass. And then I am sure Lady Tutterton would not have cared to make my acquaintance; and—and we might have met Denis, Sophy. He is like my own son. I must always be fond of him, no matter what he does. Still I cannot help feeling a little awkward with him. I dare-say it is from not having seen him for so long. The army and the colonies change a boy into a man."

"I do not think you would have met him at the Tuttertons,'" said I. I knew where he was.

"Perhaps not, Sophy, my dear—perhaps not. But your aunt. . . . Sophy, Sophy, you know what your aunt is! and the time she will stay! and the *gauche* things she says! I hope she will not be very angry, my dear. Not that I much care! I am accustomed to her. When we were girls together, she never would let me have my own way; for if I did what I liked, I never heard the end of it. Your aunt always has been a great talker."

"I am sure she has," said I; "and it is a great pity she was not born deaf and dumb. With her natural taste for the thing, she might then have talked in moderation."

"But Edward!" exclaimed my mother, not paying attention to my remarks—"your Uncle Sherbrook! My dear Sophy, I quite forgot him! Edward is not pleasant to meet when you have offended Jane; and if Jane is kept waiting for the carriage! . . . Sophy, Sophy, what shall I do?"

I proposed we should get out at Stanhope Gate, and send the empty fly quickly back to Lowndes Square by Park Lane. We did so, and drove home in a hansom—a much pleasanter conveyance than our coffin.

My mother's repentance and nervousness overcame her on our arrival in Montagu Square. As her spirits fell, mine rose. I was still young enough to enjoy being slightly wicked. Young people are tired by the humdrum of perfection, and it is the variety of malicious sinfulness which they find attractive. None but angels can bear to be bored eternally.

My mother watched me with surprise. "Sophy, my dear, you don't seem to realise what your Aunt Jane will be like when she comes home."

"Oh, I do! perfectly! perfectly!—upper lip and all; and I will have some fun!"

"Fun, Sophy! fun?" My mother opened her eyes and stared at me in amazement. I tossed my head as if I had the Sher-

brooks in my back hair, and wished to give them a shake. "My dear child," cried my mother, "you look quite wicked;" and then her voice changed—"What a spirit you have, Sophy!" This was said with all the admiring power of a shy mother's heart. I felt the admiration. It is really quite exciting to be admired. From the moment I thought I was considered a courageous, spirited creature, I became one.

Quick as thought, I put my mother to bed, with a deranged liver for her disease. She had to jump under the clothes having still a stocking on one leg, for Aunt Jane's voice sounded in the hall. I ran down-stairs to meet my aunt. There was anger in her eye, severity upon her upper lip. "Oh, Aunt Jane," I exclaimed, "have you any calomel?" Had I said, "Woman, hast thou a devil?" I could not have produced a more startling effect. This I had foreseen.

"Calomel, child?—calomel?"

"You may say what you like, Aunt Jane—you may say what you like," and I did not let her say anything, "Calomel! I will give no medicine but calomel!" and I called after our old butler, "John, go to the nearest chemist and buy twenty-four grains of calomel; and be quick, John—quick! No, no, Aunt Jane; you may treat Uncle Sherbrook——"

"Edward?" screamed the frightened wife. "Dreadful girl, have you dared to doctor your uncle?"

"I doctor my uncle? I meddle with his very peculiar inside? Catch me interfering with Uncle Sherbrook's liver! No, Aunt Jane, you may kill Uncle Sherbrook on a new system and your own system; I will cure my friends on the old system. I believe in castor-oil, rhubarb, and magnesia, salts and senna, bleeding, and calomel: in all cases of liver derangement, I decidedly believe in calomel. If Uncle Sherbrook were my husband, I should put blue-pill in his soup every Monday—give a weekly fillip to his constitution, and salivate him without his knowing it."

It was thus I changed the current of my aunt's thoughts and temper. I pulled the rein, and had the satisfaction of hearing her gallop away on my own highroad. She lost herself in the mazes of the new system and the old system, the water-cure and cold compress. "The doctors ruined your uncle's constitution; but I have been the means, under Providence, of restoring his health. Young people nowadays give their opinion . . ." So with the old system and the new system, young people's opinions, and Uncle Sherbrook's constitution, my aunt entirely forgot to ask for whom I wanted the calomel. Aunt Jane's mind

is a world without centre of gravity. Her ideas twist and twirl in all directions, for there is nothing to keep them on their legs.

I did not take her into my mother's room until I considered her brains were sufficiently muddled to prevent her feeling any astonishment at the suddenness of mamma's attack. I first argued her up each step of the stairs; and when John brought me the calomel, I ran to the invalid's bedside, declaring I would make the patient swallow every one of the twenty-four grains. Aunt Jane trotted after me with surprising agility. She caught my hands, and held them tightly. I was glad to let her hold them, though I pretended to struggle. My aunt kept calling at the top of her voice for Snipkins.

"Snipkins! Snipkins! bring the big bandage Mr Sherbrook wears round his waist, and the long one I have for my knee; and mind, do not forget the oil-silk!"

I still threatened calomel. I resisted my aunt's entreaties and demands, till the moment came when I knew her head might be trusted to turn from the honours of victory. Then I left her alone with mamma and the liver complaint. Aunt Jane had the infinite satisfaction of swathing her sister in wet bandages.

When Uncle Sherbrook missed my mother from the dinner-table, I might have had some awkward questions to answer, had not Aunt Jane immediately launched into eloquent praise of her own medical wisdom and skill. It was an inexhaustible subject.

That night, when my aunt went to bed, I took off my mother's wet bandages, and wrapped her in flannel instead. I lay awake, being excited by the events of the day,—for they were events in a life like mine. I laughed as I thought how cleverly we had managed Aunt Jane, and escaped paying a visit to the Tuttertons in her company. I exulted in our victory; and then I dozed, and awoke again to pick up my thoughts where I had left them. They began the same; but this time, I know not how, they took another turn in ending. Instead of thinking, as before, that I had acted like a statesman, and gained a great diplomatic victory over Aunt Jane, it struck me unawares, how utterly insignificant our petty squabbles were! This notion provoked me. I wished our quarrels were important enough to upset the peace of Europe. I laughed at so ridiculous a wish; and then, while I imagined I was still awake, I fell into a nightmare, and dreamt that I wrestled, in the sight of many people, with a powerful gladiator. I alone knew that I fought with Aunt

Jane. I thought she had disguised herself as a gladiator, in order to wrestle unknown with the devil. She wore pink fleshings, and a red band round her head, and looked exactly like a street-juggler. I struggled hard for victory. The voice of the crowd urging me on gave me strength, so that I overcame the gladiator, and knocked her down, and laid my foot upon her face. Now my foot was naked; I felt the cheek was hard like wood, and not like flesh at all. I knelt, and passed my hand over my enemy's face: it was neither man nor woman, but a wooden image. I heard the multitude jeer at me, crying out, "She fought with a doll, and knocked it down, and thought herself a mighty conqueror!" I tried to run away and hide in a hole where I should not hear the mocking words; but I could not move—a horrid, powerless sensation paralysed my limbs. Louder and louder came the cry, "She thought herself a mighty conqueror!" A shout of laughter in my ear awoke me. I tried to think and to unravel this queer dream; but in thinking, I fell sound asleep.

Aunt Jane felt her patient's pulse the first thing next morning. She said the cold compress had relieved the internal inflammation; and I heard her remark to Snipkins that she now felt justified in declaring Mrs Thursley to be out of danger. She advised my mother to stay in bed for breakfast.

Mamma asked me if I thought it might be wiser for her to do so.

Before giving an answer, I ran down-stairs to see if the post had come, and I found a business letter for Uncle Sherbrook,—a "blue-bubble," as we called the new attorney's blue envelope.

"There is a blue-bubble," said I to my mother, "so you may safely venture down; for the Sherbrooks will barely inquire after your health,—they will be too much and too pleasantly occupied."

She took my advice, and I rejoice to say no evil consequences ensued.

CHAPTER VII.

The blue-bubble contained business of solemn importance, and my aunt's mind was so engaged with great affairs, that nearly twenty-four hours elapsed before she spoke of her visit to Lowndes Square; but having once begun to speak on the

subject, she had a great deal to say. We soon knew by heart all she had said, but were not so well acquainted with the Tuttertons' remarks. Miss Tutterton's manners had not fascinated her future aunt.

"She has none of the Christian charity, Sophia, that I was accustomed to in my youth, and she contradicted me flatly when I said Miss Elmer-Elmer has a very fine voice."

We perceived Aunt Jane had stumbled, as usual, upon the wrong topic, and were glad to have been absent at the time.

Where the daughter had failed to captivate, the mother had proved a charmer. Aunt Jane fell in love with that "charming, right-minded, right-thinking Lady Tutterton. For I can assure you, Sophia, she holds exactly the same views I do, and I discovered no leaning on her part towards Ritualistic mummery."

The Sherbrooks were determined my mother should invite the Tuttertons to dinner. My uncle spoke to mamma seriously. My mother and I chose a very fine day to pay our first visit to Lowndes Square. The Tuttertons were out driving, so we left our cards, and an invitation as well.

A fortnight after my uncle had given my mother his solemn advice, Sir Horace Tutterton, Lady Tutterton, Miss Tutterton, and Denis dined with us. The Sherbrooks had preordained it should be strictly a family party, and it was one.

Denis arrived with the Tuttertons, but he did not come into the room at the same moment as they. He entered alone, with plenty of space before him, and with a sort of glory, like a crowned head. He was still much out of joint, and could hardly be said to walk. He tossed his head, and got on somehow,—I think by the help of his shirt-cuffs. Denis was particularly condescending. He patronised us all, and talked incessantly. As neither Sir Horace nor Miss Tutterton appeared to have a word to say, I was glad my cousin monopolised the conversation, though I saw Aunt Jane did not like his doing so at all.

She tried to congratulate her only brother's only son, and to hope this marriage would be a source of happiness to him and to Miss Tutterton, in this world and the next; but her nephew dexterously cut short all improvement of the occasion by alluding to some queer marriage customs he had heard were still observed amongst the Red Indians of the Rocky Mountains. Whereupon Aunt Jane tried to hope it would not be long before the blessing of evangelical native clergymen would be asked and obtained in the marriage ceremonies of the whole

world,—“from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans,” said she, “and from the Mediterranean to the Antarctic Seas.” My cousin, quickly seizing the transition, gave a voluble account of his passage across the Atlantic, of Canada, of his adventures there, of the Canadian ladies, of rinks and toboggining. He rattled on just as he had done that day at Lady Arabella’s, and said much what he had said before. Aunt Jane could not get in another word.

I almost admired the adroit, easy way Denis kept the conversation on his own tongue,—not letting Aunt Jane get under way, but seizing her transitions, and talking for us all—turning round to my mother, then back to my aunt, then getting up and addressing Miss Tutterton. I cannot say my clever cousin had what I should call very good manners; he was fidgety, and reminded me of Molière’s two *marquis*, who get up one instant and sit down the next, “*suivant leur inquiétude naturelle*.”

At dinner, my mother and Aunt Jane sat at each side of Sir Horace, Uncle Sherbrook took down Lady Tutterton, and Denis sat next his betrothed. With much ease of manner, he helped Uncle Sherbrook to do the honours of our house and table—or, to speak more correctly, from time to time he graciously encouraged my uncle to help him.

Miss Tutterton was brusque and awkward even with my cousin, and she had a way of turning her shoulder to you when she spoke. Her conversation, or rather her “thankees,” came by fits and starts, and there were dead-stops between them. Such a contrast as she was to Denis, whose tongue still raced on with fluent ease, like Mein Herr von Klam’s cork leg—tooral-ooral-ooral-ooral-lido! Denis’s ease of manner was of a peculiar kind, for it did not make you feel at home with him. He was still the new acquaintance who would know you to-day and cut you to-morrow.

After dinner, when we ladies went up to the drawing-room, it fell to my lot to try and entertain Miss Tutterton; but she was so short in her manner, there was such an odd mixture of abruptness and military flash about her, that she dazed and frightened me. She showed me clearly that she did not care to be bothered speaking to a lady, and I felt I was altogether of the wrong sex. I was taken with a shy fit, and to my great annoyance found I had not a word to say. The “Drill-sergeant” scared me.

It was evident, from Miss Tutterton’s masculine and strangely inelegant movements, that she had served her time, most likely in the dragoons. Sir Horace must have got a commission for

her when she was quite young. She walked as if she expected her sword and sabretache would hit her shins ; so at each step, she gave a twist to get out of the way. I was convinced it could only have been during a military career that Miss Tutterton had learnt to go right-about-left, but I could not imagine where she had picked up her trick of saying "thankee." Lady Tutterton did not say "thankee." Perhaps Miss Tutterton caught the trick when quartered in the colonies, for it sounds as if it might have come from the confines of America. Certainly it was the oddest of tricks ; and what odd tricks people can give themselves !

When the gentlemen came up from the dining-room, Miss Tutterton went to the piano. My cousin stood beside her ; and when she nodded her head, he turned over the pages. Without a hint, he could not have turned them over at the right moment, for he knew nothing whatever of music. I could not help thinking this was all for the best, as two great amateur musicians ought never to marry. I cannot imagine them living together in peace.

When Miss Tutterton came to the end of her song—and it was a long one—she said to me, "Must positively sing it again ! Practising for old Sam !"

Surprise gave me sufficient courage to exclaim, " Practising to please an old Samuel, Miss Tutterton ! I should have thought that at present you only cared to sing to a young Denis ! "

Miss Tutterton stared at me in mute amazement. I saw she had not a notion what I meant ; and no wonder, because I afterwards discovered that SAM meant a Society of Amateur Musicians, and that she was taking this opportunity of practising for a concert rehearsal ! The music was fearfully learned. I did not dislike it, though I thought it unnecessarily difficult —too much execution in it, and too little soul. But mamma and Aunt Jane were much bored at having to sit silent for nearly an hour while Miss Tutterton practised what they afterwards declared were "mausoleum dirges." My mother did not like classical music. One of her reasons always struck me as being a curious bit of musical criticism. She would say, the few times she had been at Exeter Hall to hear an oratorio, she had seen more dowdy frights amongst the chorus and audience than she had seen elsewhere in the whole course of her life. The scarlet opera-cloaks disgusted her with Handel.

Sir Horace said "Hush !" if Aunt Jane ventured on a whisper. Sir Houghty-Toughty was not a bad nickname, and hit off the crusty old disciplinarian well. Both parents paid deferential

attention to their daughter's music. My mother politely remarked to Sir Hoightly-Toightly, that Miss Tutterton sang most tastefully ; but he received the mild compliment with evident contempt.

Lady Tutterton behaved more civilly. "Your daughter has a charming talent for music, Lady Tutterton."

" You are too kind, Mrs Thursley—too kind ! now really you are ! but Georgina is passionately fond of it, and is always happy to sing for her friends. There is no pleasure, Mrs Sherbrook, like giving pleasure to others."

Certainly Aunt Jane was right. Lady Tutterton's sentiments were admirable, and the way she expressed them added to their beauty. Her smile was sweetness itself, and she smiled exactly at the right moment : she seemed to have perfect command of her countenance. It would have been impossible to tell if she recognised Mrs Thubs and the plain platter-face. Her politeness to my mother, to Aunt Jane, and even to me, had a shade of flattery in its excessive deference. Lady Tutterton was singularly unlike her husband and daughter.

My cousin asked mamma if Lady Tutterton were not a charming woman. " Must allow," said he, " fell in love with the mother before the daughter." Most undoubtedly Lady Tutterton appeared to have fallen in love with Denis. She paid him the most unceasing and flattering attention.

I was much struck by the pride my cousin seemed to take in Miss Tutterton's distinguished position as a leader amongst amateur musicians. But I noticed with no small amount of surprise, that it was not her really great musical talent which he admired. He did not look upon music with an art-loving eye. It was the social aspect of song which caught his quick sight. I have since remarked that it catches many an eye like his. If a lady sings, or if people who entertain fancy she can sing, she is made much of in that set where ladies long to be admired—a set where Royalty will ask to be introduced to you, and will beg for an *encore*, and where you will have the opportunity of saying, " I had to sing it again for the Prince. Such a bore ! " It was from my cousin's conversation at dinner that I gathered this knowledge. I had thought people only sang because they loved music, but I now perceived there are some who practise incessantly because they wish to get on in society. I had heard Denis telling my mother how " her Royal Highness would become member Society Amateur Musicians. Did not want her. Was to have taken chief solo at concert. Gave it up last hour. Georgina most good-naturedly sang in her stead.

Princess very much obliged. Awful bore for Georgina!" I do not know to which of the Royal Family my cousin alluded; I only know it bored Georgina to sing for the Princess.

Lady Tutterton, her daughter, and my cousin were "going on" to several *at homes*. My cousin impressed this fact upon us by frequent repetition. "Dumbledore's, Lereker's. Must manage Furley's. Other drums take their chance. Promised Travis."

My mother said a few words to Miss Tutterton of the pleasure she felt in making her acquaintance. It was a kind little speech; but I think it was rather thrown away on the bride-elect, for this lady only said "Thankee!" and left the room abruptly.

As my mother was speaking, I looked round and saw Denis was at that moment preparing to make a stylish exit; so I opened both folding-doors, and Denis left the room by the help of his shirt-cuffs, and in as telling a manner as he had entered it.

I rejoiced when our new connections had said good-night, for I am not quite sure I think a family party the pleasant thing it is supposed to be.

Aunt Jane was more delighted than ever with Lady Tutterton. "Such charming manners, and such truly Christian sentiments! How I wish Miss Tutterton were like her!"

"Then," said I, "you wish the daughter were as good an actress as the mother. It is true the Drill-sergeant is a military man, but I think at least he is sincere."

"Child! child!" exclaimed my aunt; "child, what will become of you?"

CHAPTER VIII.

The wedding took place at the end of the season. The Sherbrooks went to it, and so did we. The Clarckes were there. Lady Clarke and Lady Tutterton are first cousins. They were both handsome girls, of better fortune than family. Lady Clarke brought her husband £60,000, and an extra *c* to his name. They say that immediately after her marriage she insisted on the *c* or a separation. When at last she signed herself with a *c* before her *k*, it is said Lady Clarke felt she herself had come over with the Conqueror, and not with the money-lending Jews.

There is nothing particular to tell about the wedding, except that Miss Tutterton had only two bride's-maids. Miss Tutterton said she "would not have a pack of women at her tail." The two bridesmaids were Fanny Clarke and Miss Eleanor Warbattle. Lady Clarke told us, this latter middle-aged young lady was Lord George's niece, and a charming pianiste in the fashionable-classical style.

Mr Travis, Lord Furley's eldest son, was the best-man.

After the wedding, my mother and I went down to Sherbrook Hall, and spent a month there with much advantage to our souls. While we were there, Aunt Jane was edified by a visit from Lady Arabella Scott. I happened to be out when this rainbow of charity called; but I heard the black silk skirts had been forwarded to Turkey, and that Lady Arabella was now more particularly interested in the Egyptian wife and mother, for the reforms so urgently required in Constantinople were found to be equally needed in Cairo.

They never saw much company at Sherbrook Hall, so we had hardly any other visitors except the Rector and Mary Sherbrook. Poor Mary Sherbrook! she is an amiable dummy. As to Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, I am thankful to say, she was away in Scotland on a collecting tour, visiting her late husband's relations. We could bear to stay our month at Sherbrook Hall, better when Mrs Stewart was away, than when she was at Riverbank. We left Sherbrook the morning of the day my cousin and his bride were to arrive at Harefield Abbey. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was expected at Riverbank the same day.

The Sherbrooks had intended paying the Rigardy-Wrenstones the very great compliment of calling on them immediately. Aunt Jane wrote to mamma that "Edward" had purposed accompanying her, as, for her sake, he was willing to pay this attention to her only brother's only son; "but Denis," continued my aunt, "has given out, through Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart, that he does not wish to be visited till next Monday fortnight."

"Catherine Stewart!" exclaimed my mother; "how I wish she would not meddle or give out anything!"

"To meddle is her mission in life," said I. "But never mind, my dear; read on." So mamma took up the letter again and read—

"Denis does not wish to be visited till next Monday fortnight, when, he says, he will be happy to receive those who are entitled to call upon Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. This is very condescending of Denis, and Edward and I wonder if we are

entitled to call upon our nephew's wife." The expression "entitled to call" had clearly offended the Sherbrooks.

Aunt Jane wrote to my mother much oftener than usual for some little time to come. She frequently mentioned "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," for it would appear my cousin's wife was never to be addressed by her Christian name. Denis particularly requested his relations would not take the liberty of calling his wife Georgina. My aunt wrote to us,—"And when Catherine told us that Denis had asked her to tell us this, what do you suppose Edward actually said to Catherine? Why, he said: 'Mrs Stewart, my nephew is taking an unnecessary precaution, for it is highly improbable any one of us would have thought of calling Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone Georgina. I might have been tempted to call my new relation George; but I shall not do so now, you may tell my nephew, unless especially requested.' And Edward really did say all this!" We both exclaimed, "Wonderful!" and I felt sure Uncle Sherbrook's great effort of speech must have recalled to Aunt Jane's Scriptural mind, the eloquence of Balaam's ass.

I think Denis made a mistake when he desired his relations not to call his wife Georgina. He offended them by doing so, and put them in a bad humour; and then "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone" proved too formal for the family circle. So the consequence was, that before long, our distinguished connection was the only lady I know who was invariably mentioned by a nickname amongst her husband's relations. We sometimes called her the "Drill-sergeant," but not often, for we considered this name to be the property of old "Sam." As Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has a trick of twisting her shoulders and very high-stepping action when she walks, we generally called her "Jumping Georgy." We might indeed have nicknamed her "Thankee," and it would have been shorter. It is strange that all the Tuttertons should have nicknames.

Aunt Jane's letters still continued.

My aunt said, the Monday on which the Wrenstones had announced they would receive those "entitled to call," was a wet day; and I can well believe the possibility of taking out Robert Jones and the horses in the rain, never even entered the Sherbrooks' head. Some people make up their mind to do a certain thing on a certain day. They may be a week, a fortnight, and longer, waiting for the settled time, without wavering; but should an accident prevent their doing what they intended on the day fixed, their mind becomes unmoored, and they seem to go back over the old waters, striking upon rocks

they had struck on before, and asking your advice as to how they should steer—using, perhaps, the very arguments they had already used and you had answered.

From the wet Monday until the following Thursday week, which Aunt Jane wrote “was dry, *D.G.*,” the Sherbrooks appear to have discussed all over again whether they should call on their nephew and his bride, or wait till the Wrenstones visited them. In the end, it seems it was entirely owing to Aunt Jane that the Sherbrooks drove over to the Abbey on the afternoon of the Thursday which “was dry, *D.G.*” I read the letter my aunt wrote to mamma giving an account of this first visit to Harefield. Aunt Jane’s was a leaden, a dead pen, and not a living one expressing living thoughts. My aunt did not usually write like a human being with passions and changing emotions, but rather as if she copied her blotless letters out of a pious letter-writer in which they had forgotten to print all the stops. I was therefore astonished, in this particular letter, to feel a real warm sentiment trying to force itself through Aunt Jane’s unwieldy style, like a drowning man through ice.

When Aunt Jane drove along the well-known avenue and drew near to the Abbey house, old feelings seem to have come back to her, surprising her heart into softness and emotion. She thought of the day when she had gone in haste to the Abbey, hearing her brother was dying; and she remembered looking up at the windows of “poor dear Denis’s room,” and seeing the blinds pulled down, “and I knew he was dead; and now as Robert was walking the horses up the hill just near the hall-door (you know, Sophia), I looked up again at the same windows and I saw the blinds were pulled up, and that there were white lace curtains and rose-coloured ones inside, and I prayed the Almighty would not send His Angel of Death to this house for many years so that the newly married husband and wife might not be called upon to separate in their youth, and although you well know, my dear Sophia, that our only brother’s only son is not what he might be, still I will allow I did wish to welcome him to his home, and I did feel that Providence lets the old people linger on in this vale of tears that they may forgive and be kind to the young ones.”

Aunt Jane’s letter then went on to describe how Thomas got off the box to ring at the hall-door; and how she proposed to Edward they should walk into the house without ringing, and surprise their nephew, as she used to do in poor dear Denis’s lifetime; and how Edward strongly advised her not to do so, but to wait till the butler answered the bell; and how the

butler came at last, and two footmen also ; and how, when the butler was asked if Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was at home, he had answered so that Aunt Jane and my uncle could hear him in the carriage—"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is not at home. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is at luncheon. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not be at home this afternoon. At present, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone only receives three times a-week — on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays." "And so," continued my aunt, "we left cards as if we were strangers and not relations and we had to turn round and drive home, and Edward said it would be a very long time before he paid Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone another visit."

"I think," said my mother, "it is a little foolish to make enemies where you might make friends. Jane is not bad-hearted, and she would really like to be friends with Denis and his wife — if only," added mamma, smiling, "to have the friendly relation's privilege of finding fault with the new establishment. She might cast her bread upon fresh waters." And then, blushing for the honour of her family, my mother said, "Sophy, I am grieved the young people are giving themselves airs. It is bad-style. It is very vulgar to bring London ways and manners into country parts."

As the winter wore on, Aunt Jane's correspondence with my mother slackened. We heard less and less of the Rigardy-Wrenstones. There was no intimacy between Sherbrook and Harefield. However, if my aunt happened to write early in the week, she did generally mention having met Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone at church, and then she invariably added some weighty remark about the "thin end of the wedge." This led us to imagine there was something in Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone which suggested the thin end of the wedge. Now merely to look at Jumping Georgy, you would have said she was the longer and the thicker end.

Aunt Jane and my uncle, Snipkins and the little black bag, arrived in Montagu Square at the beginning of the London season. The Sherbrooks had travelled up to town in the same train, but not in the same carriage, with the Rigardy-Wrenstones ; my cousins went in a *coupé* by themselves.

We did not "go out" often this season ; for when the Sherbrooks got an invitation, they rarely accepted it, and Aunt Jane did not like us to leave her and "Edward" at home. The Clarckes gave no ball, much to Aunt Jane's satisfaction. My aunt seemed to think they were "awakening." We only went to three or four crushes. Lady Arabella gave a musical crush,

and Aunt Jane went to it. Lady Arabella told Aunt Jane she had intended getting up a concert for the benefit of Christian Egyptian women suffering from ophthalmia, but had found she could not manage it. Lady Arabella was much to be pitied. I heard her say, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, I know *you* will feel for me! I fear I shall be unable to give my annual charity concert. Miss Tut—Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, I mean—won't sing. She says her throat is delicate; but, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, it is last year's solo, and the Pasha. It is the Pasha! And then Mrs Elmer—tiresome woman!—declares she cannot allow Miss Ermyntrude to sing more than one solo and one duet. And Lord Studhorsey—he is laid up with bronchitis; and the Chevalier de Clairon has gone to Vienna. And would you believe it?—I am *so* unlucky!—it was only last week that Mr Reginald Meltem and the Elmer-Elmers had a tiff. He is quite the charming tenor when he sings with a soprano. So there was a *dénouement*, and Mrs Elmer-Elmer told Mr Reginald Meltem she could not allow him to sing '*t'amo*' with *her* daughter. The Baron, poor dear creature, he will sing with anybody—if only he had not lost those two high notes! I myself, unfortunately, cannot sing just at present, as I have a return of my peculiar sore-throat. The Baron will play, it is true, and so will Madame Scratchowitz—exquisite pianiste! But who cares to listen to the piano? Ah, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, there is no real taste for music in this country!"

I wondered Lady Arabella did not get hold of Lord George Warbattle and the Spanish solo; but I have since heard that Lord George is Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's own particular property, and never by any chance sings the Spanish solo where Miss Elmer-Elmer performs.

At Lady Arabella's musical crush, we had only a solo from Miss Elmer-Elmer, and a duet from the same charming soprano and the Baron von Klammerhammer. Really, the poor old Baron surprised me: with the help of the eye-glass and the tiptoes, he almost caught his high notes! Connoisseurs say he is quite an *artiste*. Indeed it is wonderful how every one has a good word for the Baron von Klammerhammer. Perhaps it is because no one is jealous of him.

We also had a duet on the piano from Madame Scratchowitz and the Baron. I think they played one of Beethoven's sonatas; but I am not quite sure, for as soon as they began to play, everybody began to talk. The piano is the one thing in England which seems to give the power of speech to our silent nation.

My mother met Lady Clarke for a moment at Lady Arabella's. Aunt Jane spoke to Lady Tutterton. The Wrenstones were not with her. My Lady Tuttut did not appear very cordial to Aunt Jane. Lady Tutterton went out of the room during Miss Elmer-Elmer's solo, and sat in an adjoining boudoir talking all the time to a friend ; yet, in the course of the evening, I observed Lady Tutterton and Mrs Elmer-Elmer bow to each other with profuse politeness.

Nothing could exceed Tuttut's cordiality of manner to Lady Arabella. This surprised me, for Lady Arabella was anything but cordial to her.

I met the Clarke girls. They nodded, but did not speak to me. They were too much occupied, each one with her especial admirer. Louisa was looking up at Mr Scott, smiling delightedly as she listened to him. She wore the same smile I had seen her wear last year at her own ball.

The Clarkes' crush took place the night after Lady Arabella's. Theirs was also a musical *at home*. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was the Clarkes' prima-donna, notwithstanding the delicacy of her throat. I need hardly say Miss Elmer-Elmer did not appear.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone sang three solos, and one duet with Lord George Warbattle. Lord George gave us the Spanish solo. Being clapped, he sang it a second time. I think he would have liked to sing it a third. We had no tenor. Mr Reginald Meltem never sang with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. He was reported to be in mortal terror of the "Drill-sergeant." It was said the Drill-sergeant had told him he had no method, and had offered to teach him how to bring out his voice from the right place. Mr Reginald Meltem did not appreciate this kindness as he should have done, so he took to singing '*t'amo*' with Miss Elmer-Elmer, and ceased to bring out his voice before Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. Just fancy my surprise when I looked round and saw Fanny and Louisa Clarke standing up to sing a duet ! In old times they had not a notion of music. The one who did not sing flat, sung sharp. I was astonished to hear them now perform an Italian duet with three runs and a shake in it ! and really quite passably !—a little screaming here and there ; not much expression anywhere ; still in time, and not altogether out of tune. A miracle, I declare ! Those London singing-masters work wonders.

In the beginning of June the Tuttertons sent us a card for an *at home*. Aunt Jane, mamma, and I went to this party—Uncle Sherbrook would not come. Lady Tutterton received us

with marked coldness, as if she had not expected us to accept her invitation. I could hardly prevent my aunt from expressing her astonishment in one of her loud whispers.

At homes are dull affairs, unless you have a very large acquaintance, and the power of moving about in a dense crowd. I perceived the Clarkes in the far distance of a back drawing-room. Louisa was looking particularly pretty. The gentleman at whom she was smiling stood with his back to me. I thought Mr David Scott appeared taller than usual; and no wonder, for when this gentleman happened to turn round, I saw Louisa's friend was not Mr Scott, but some other man! I wondered if Louisa smiled delightedly and looked up at every one she spoke to, and if she found all mankind equally agreeable. I thought how much a pretty or an ugly face might change the nature of a girl; and I wondered if, having a pretty face, I too should find everybody delightful, and should wear the same sweet smile for all the world. I could not conceive myself an universally amiable creature, without strong likes and dislikes; but then I could not imagine poor Sophy with a handsome face.

While I was thinking of these things, Denis passed through the crowd beside us, and nodded to my mother and Aunt Jane. My aunt was not content with a nod from her only brother's only son, so she pressed forwards and shook hands with her nephew.

"Very hot!" cried he; "such a crowd! great bore! could not leave out any one, you know. People awfully offended! Going down to Harefield soon! Must look you up before I go." And he smiled, gave a slight wave of his hand, and turned to an elderly lady at my elbow. "Oh, Lady Grace! delighted to see you! Won't you take an ice?" Lady Grace accepted, and my cousin begging me to stand aside, made way for her.

We saw Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone in a distant corner talking to Miss Eleanor Warbattle. Lord George passed us on the stairs, and I wondered we had not the Spanish solo in the course of the evening. But this was not a musical *at home*. Perhaps Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's voice was again in a delicate state; or perhaps, having frightened Mr Reginald Meltem, she was at a loss for a tenor. Certainly one Spanish solo, even twice encored, would not quite constitute a concert in itself, though I daresay Lord George might think it would.

The Sherbrooks insisted on our asking the Tuttertons to dinner as our house was not large enough for an *at home*.

"Edward and I know what you ought to do, Sophia," said Aunt Jane.

The Tuttertons refused the invitation, saying they would be out of town on the 1st of July. That very day we happened to see Lady Tutterton and Sir Horace driving together in Hyde Park. Aunt Jane was much shocked to find Lady Tutterton had refused our invitation on a false pretence. When Aunt Jane refused an invitation, she made a point of giving her real, true reasons. My mother was neither surprised nor angry. At first my aunt was convinced there must be some mistake, and she expected Lady Tutterton would call next day to apologise. But Lady Tutterton did not call at our house. She had not left town, for we saw her again several times in the Park. She recognised us once, and bowed most graciously.

"I can see," said my mother, "that Lady Tutterton would never cut you; but she well understands the art of dropping you."

"What have we done," I exclaimed, "that she should cut us or drop our acquaintance? What an extraordinary woman she must be!"

"An extraordinary woman, Sophy?—no; a very, very ordinary one," retorted my mother; "there are numbers like her to be found in town. She has married her daughter to my nephew: the thing is done; so why should she now be civil or flattering to me? I do not entertain in the style she admires. I am not rich, and I have no titled charms wherewith to fascinate her. *Parvenues* like Lady Tutterton worship rank, and love riches, because riches can entertain them. They hate to keep up any useless acquaintance. I know the world, because I have lived many years in London since your father's death, without being rich or grand."

"I don't believe," I exclaimed, indignantly—"I don't believe there is another woman in London as worldly as Lady Tutterton. Insulting woman! I detest her!"

My mother laughed—"Sophy, Sophy," she said, "I wonder you are not indifferent to her! I wonder you can waste hatred on a mere stranger. I could not hate like that. If ever I were to hate—" She hesitated, was silent a moment, and then,—"I could not hate," she began; "no, Sophy, I feel I could not even hate those I once had loved, . . . and I did love that boy! You see I had no son of my own. And now he cuts me! . . . But we old people," she added, gently, "do not hate. Cold worldliness, ingratitude, disappointing carelessness, no longer send us into angry passions. They only weary

us, and make us feel our hearts are withered, like our poor old faces. If you were not kind to me, dear child, I should just die." She put her arm lovingly round my neck. "Don't look so angry; you are too violent, too ignorant, Sophy! The world is indeed worldly. Every one knows it, and I have known it for years. . . . But I am like you, Sophy, though I am an old woman. . . . I can hardly believe it!"

Denis called on us as he was leaving town. He had not called before. My mother and I were at home. My mother received him kindly. Denis talked incessantly. He asked questions, and answered them himself. My cousin lisped every now and then, and left out many of the small words.

"Going down to Harefield," said he; "thought look you up first. Furleys coming to us. Travis, no bad gun; nor Lady Julia either. House full—Furleys, Tuttertons, Hartmoors, Castletowers, Dumbledores. Lady Castletower never been that part of country. We go to them. On to Castle Travis. One house to another. Don't know when home again." Denis did not pay a long visit. I was not sorry when he went away.

Aunt Jane left us early in July. She and my uncle wanted us to spend the month of August with them as usual, but my mother refused to go to Sherbrook Hall, and for once she had a good excuse. Denis had never said to her, "When you are at Sherbrook, you must come and see me in my new home." So she said, "If I go to the neighbourhood, Sophy, Denis will think I wish for an invitation to his house. He is the very man to say so." I could not contradict this, for it was true—indeed I was as glad as my mother to think we should not have to spend our usual month this year at Sherbrook Hall.

Towards the end of July, Aunt Jane came up to town for a day to consult Madame Julie Browne about the mourning she ought to wear for the wife of a first cousin once removed. My aunt lunched with us. She told us that, for some reason or other, she could not tell why, most of the visitors expected at the Abbey were not coming, and that Catherine declared the Rigardy-Wrenstones would go away on a tour of visits before long; and my aunt said, if they did go, we must come down to Sherbrook Hall. She told us she could not ask her nephew and niece anything about their plans herself, because she never saw them except at church; and she spoke vaguely, yet solemnly, of the progress of the thin end of the wedge. She then passed on to Madame Julie Browne's lax ideas of mourning. I perceived we should have heard a great deal more of the

Rigardy-Wrenstones and the thin end of the wedge, only for a difference of opinion which had arisen between Aunt Jane and Madame Julie Browne. My aunt thought you ought most decidedly to wear crape on the body of your dress when you went into mourning for the wife of a first cousin once removed, while it appeared Madame Julie said crape never went beyond a first cousin, and not always so far ; she considered jet trimmings a sufficient compliment to the memory of more distant relations. "And what will Catherine say," cried my aunt, "if she sees me in a plain black silk ?" Poor dear Aunt Jane returned to Sherbrook in a perturbed state of mind. I rejoice to say we heard, a few days after, that Madame Julie did consent to put a crape *rusche* round the neck and cuffs of Aunt Jane's new dress. I was glad to hear this, for I knew the crape would give Aunt Jane peace and satisfaction, and enable her to feel comfortable under Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's discerning eye.

On the last day of July, Aunt Jane wrote to tell us the Rigardy-Wrenstones had started off northwards, and that in the village it was said they had gone to Balmoral, but that Catherine said they were going to visit the Hartmoors, Castletowers, and Furleys, besides the Dukes of Dumbledore, Sutherland, and Argyll. "So they will be a long time away," wrote my aunt ; "therefore Edward and I insist, Sophia, that you and Sophy come as usual and pay us your annual visit."

This was very kind of my uncle and aunt ; but we were sorry the Rigardy-Wrenstones were gone, as now we had no good excuse to keep us away from Harefield. We had to go and stay at Sherbrook Hall. I was never happy there, and my mother used to be quite miserable.

CHAPTER IX.

"Little things are not little things, if they are done like great ones." This favourite saying of Uncle Sherbrook's was his own portrait painted in words. My uncle cut the 'Morning Post' at the side-table, before breakfast and after prayers, with the grave face of a man who knows he is performing an important action.

The Sherbrooks breakfasted at eight o'clock, but often and often, it would happen that they did not leave the table till

half-past nine or a quarter to ten. The conversation usually dawdled on in this style: "Jane, you say you have heard from Charlotte. How is Tom?"

"Charlotte says she hears poor Tom is better; but his wife is still very ill, Edward." Then Aunt Jane would read out lengthy extracts from Charlotte Stewart's letter. These distant Stewarts wrote the heaviest, most long-winded letters, full of Biblical texts, and giving detailed accounts of the health, doings, and deaths of the whole Stewart connection. Aunt Jane thought them sensible, interesting, improving letters. She would read them all out, but mingling her own remarks with what she read: "Inflammation of the bronchial tubes! Tom should wear the cold compress, and take a globule of aconite going to bed. 'I fear, my dear Jane, that poor Tom's poor dear wife's earthly course is run, for our days here below are numbered.' Yes, indeed — very true, Charlotte! We should always be ready for death; and, dear me! I shall have to stay in mourning if Mary dies, and that yellow-striped dress will never be worn out, for she is your second cousin, Edward?"

"Second once removed."

"Did I ever see her?"

"I think not, Jane; but you have seen her sister, Amy MacNaughten."

"Ah, yes! I remember. Then she must be your second cousin once removed, because Amy MacNaughten's mother was your second . . . No, she was your first . . . No, I am quite right; she was your second cousin. But now listen, Edward—here is good news! This will be a blessed comfort to poor Tom! 'The son in Australia has turned out an admirable, Christian-minded young man, and we hear he teaches regularly in the Sunday-schools at Melbourne.' It was Robert went to Australia? Was not it, Edward?"

"No, I think it was Richard."

"My dear Edward—"

"I believe you are right, Jane; it was Robert."

Aunt Jane often knew more about the distant Stewarts than Uncle Sherbrook; she certainly took more interest in them.

"Edward, would you like to see what Charlotte says?" Uncle Sherbrook would thank his wife, and read the letter all over again, but without comment. He then offered Aunt Jane some of the letters he had received; and though I doubt not she imagined that she read them to herself, in reality we had the benefit of the correspondence.

The Sherbrooks, I am sure, found the day too long ; but they would not shorten it by a later breakfast, so they were delighted to dawdle away an hour or more of the tedious morning. I wonder my mother and I did not die of impatience, for we were expected to sit on at table and listen to the interminable letters penned by "Charlotte," or by "poor dear John's widow," or by "Henrietta's daughter." That "dear, excellent, indefatigable creature, Catherine Stewart," was at home at Riverbank, otherwise we should have had her letters as well. When she was off on her "collecting tours," she wrote constantly to my aunt. "Catherine considers me the head of the family," Aunt Jane would say, with much satisfaction ; "so she often writes to me, and always calls me 'my dear Mrs Sherbrook ;' but I call her 'my dear Catherine'—and she likes it, because she told me to call her Catherine, and never to call her Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart ; and Catherine calls me Mrs Sherbrook because she considers Edward the head of the family."

The meals at Sherbrook Hall were serious ceremonies, preceded by the ringing of sundry bells. There was the seven-o'clock bell, merely to tell you it was seven o'clock ; then the prayer-bell ; then the breakfast-bell. At a quarter to one the warning-bell rang. This bell was intended to prepare your mind for the one-o'clock luncheon-bell. There was an afternoon-tea bell—a smaller tinkle, it is true. Then at half-past five came the dressing-bell ; at five minutes to six the frightening-bell ; and the dinner-bell at six o'clock *punctually*. By *punctually*, I do not mean anything within the bounds of the Christian religion. I mean a heathen, unrelenting exactness : to the minute ! as the clock strikes !

Uncle Sherbrook made punctuality the great virtue of life ; and certainly it was very necessary for my uncle to be so wonderfully punctual, because most days he was much occupied in doing nothing. It is true he used to write to his attorney, Mr Jones, regularly twice a-week about that right-of-way lawsuit. When at length a decision was given in his favour, and against the rights of the village, he still continued writing to Mr Jones every Tuesday and Friday. I expect this correspondence had become a habit. Uncle Sherbrook was a very methodical man, and I can well imagine his liking to do at ten o'clock on Tuesday and Friday one year, exactly the same thing he had done on Tuesday and Friday the year before. When he changed his attorney, it made a slight difference. My uncle wrote to Mr Boggle three times a-week instead of twice—on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. He either received a blue-boggle in return,

or a visit from the solicitor and agent himself. Uncle Sherbrook was not a man of such very, very large property. I would wonder what on earth he and that Boggle could be doing together; and my aunt would draw down the upper lip, and would say, "Young people know nothing of business."

Aunt Jane delighted in her punctual bells nearly as much as my uncle did, though sometimes she would mistake one bell for another, and come down too late for dinner, declaring she had thought the dinner-bell was only the frightening-bell. Such mistakes were very natural, and always permissible in the lady of the house. But my poor dear mother was supposed never to get confused in the punctual bells. You were expected to start from your room at the last ring of the frightening-bell, so as to wait down-stairs to be in time for the dinner-bell. If poor mamma were a minute late, she found Uncle Sherbrook waiting at the drawing-room door with his arm ready, and he would march her straight off into the dining-room without saying a word. If the cook that night had happened to put more grease and sound doctrine into the soup than anything else, Aunt Jane would surely remark that no one could expect the soup to be good when it was kept waiting.

But it was when the lost sheep of the house of Israel came down too late, that the words in season poured forth. Having good ears, I used to hear the servants' bells as well as the regular family tinkling. Such bell-ringing, to be sure! Enough to set a good punctual sheep out of its mind, and more than enough to addle the brains of a wicked black one like me. Bells became a second nature to me. I hardly knew if they were ringing, or if I imagined I heard them. I not unfrequently did make mistakes between warning-bells and luncheon-bells, and frightening-bells and dinner-bells.

Once—or perhaps twice—when I had jumped out of bed, thinking I had heard the seven-o'clock bell, on going down-stairs during the ringing of the next bell, I had met the Snipkins family filing across the hall, all solemn and severe, and had discovered by their looks that I was a sinner late for prayers. I must confess (I cannot be a hypocrite!) that I had felt more glad than sorry. I dreaded meeting my uncle and aunt, especially my uncle. Still it was a relief to have missed those long, those awful prayers! and that long, dreary commentary! How I hated that commentary! It nearly made a heathen of me.

The prayers lasted any length of time. They began with an extempore exhortation to prayer, given by Uncle Sherbrook standing. We then sat down to read the Bible, verse about

with the servants. This was indeed a painful ordeal to any one who believes, as I do, that the Bible is the Word of God.

My uncle gave out the chapter, and read the first verse slowly, sonorously. Aunt Jane read the second verse, vigorously accentuating the words she liked best. Then came my dear mother's turn. She felt nervous reading before the Sherbrooks. Then came my verse. Aunt Jane drew down the upper lip ; Uncle Sherbrook looked round at me. When I was younger, he used sometimes to say to me in a perfectly awful voice, "Remember, Sophia, this is a great privilege." I was so much frightened and bewildered, that I never had a notion what I was reading about.

The servants' turn came after ours. Poor things ! Aunt Jane would say, "Mary-Anne, read the fifth verse."

"Please, mum, it is Tummus's."

Thomas was the page-boy. "Thomas," Aunt Jane said every morning of her life—"Thomas, it is a great privilege to read the Lord's Word."

"Yes, mum ; I know, mum," answered Thomas, and he spelt out a verse syllable by syllable. He had been tutored by Snipkins, so he did not go too fast.

"Mary-Anne," said Aunt Jane, "the sixth verse." Unhappy Mary-Anne ! She always turned scarlet. I pitied her. She set off full gallop, came to grief, and was corrected by Uncle Sherbrook in a solemn manner. Aunt Jane has often told me that Uncle Sherbrook, being head of the house, was the stronger vessel. "It is his duty to correct, Sophy, for he can do so with all authority."

One morning Mary-Anne began, as if panting for life, "'A forward young man said—'

"Gently, Mary-Anne—gently," put in my uncle ; "'a froward man soweth strife.'"

Mary-Anne stopped. The "forward young man," came out with a jerk.

"Froward man ; not forward young man. I have corrected you before, Mary-Anne !"

My uncle's voice was loud. There was a pause. The kitchen-maid stuttered, "A fro . . . fro . . . a forward man said to his wife . . ."

"Stop, Mary-Anne !—stop ! Look at the text, I desire you !" But the unfortunate Mary-Anne had lost her head. She could think of nothing but the forward young man.

Uncle Sherbrook having spoken too loud, the kitchen-maid's verse ended in tears. I pitied her with all my heart ! but oh,

it was ludicrous ! The pomposity of my uncle and aunt ! The terror of Mary-Anne ! The queer mistakes ! The forward young man ! My mother and I dared not look at each other. We gazed out of the window, and tried hard not to laugh ; but we were cursed with slippery mouths. I felt mine twitch most painfully. Those who are blessed with a grave face (it is a blessing !) cannot conceive the tortures my mother and I went through. And then, when the kitchen-maid had finished gabbling, Emma, or rather Hemmer Snipkins, the cook, began to aspire at her leisure. Oh the sanctimonious propriety of that admirable, haspirating Snipkins family ! And the look of them ! When at last it was the privilege of Aunt Jane's own maid, Sarah Snipkins, to edify us, I could only turn my back to her and cover my face with my hands, for fear the demon of laughter should master me outright. I fear Snipkins perceived her hemphasis of all the long words amused me. I think this was one reason why she hated me ; for she did hate me in quite an extraordinary manner. I never shall forget her hemphasis on the word "Haristarchus" ! This superior person tried to read like Aunt Jane, and she partly succeeded. Snipkins was the exaggeration of her mistress's virtues, with the letter "h" superadded.

Some days the servants' reading was not so ludicrous as others. I thanked God for this ! I felt very glad when poor Mary-Anne left. She went away shortly after we came to Sherbrook Hall. She was an excellent kitchen-maid, but not suited to Aunt Jane's establishment. I happened to be present when she came to speak to Aunt Jane. She told her she "knowed it was a great privilege to read the Lord's Word ; for didn't Mrs Sherbrook tell Tummus so hevery blessed morning ? But Lor ! she supposed she never was, nor never could be, good. She could clean the pans, and do the pertaters and vegebles ; and if Miss Hemmer would let her, which she would not, she knowed right well she could do the dinner. But she never knowed how it was, when she was reading the Bible, the words came wrong like ; and Mr Sherbrook, he looked hawful like, which she seed she did not give satisfaction to Mr Sherbrook, which she was sorry for, but she wished to leave."

The forward young woman was replaced by a village girl—a worse kitchen-maid but an attentive Sunday-scholar. Such a comfort ! It was quite enough for one's edification to have Tummus, the Snipkins family, and Aunt Jane. When the Bible-reading finished, my aunt stood up and read out a hymn as she alone can read. I never knew any one else do this.

She chose the longest hymn she could find. It was the only bit of the service she had all to herself, for we joined in the responses. We were thankful Aunt Jane did not sing her hymn; it was better for her to read it.

The Rev. Dr MacShaw's Commentary followed the hymn. It began with three verses of the Bible, taken in the morning from the Old Testament, in the evening from the New. No matter what the verses were, the Commentary was always three pages long—a page to each verse. On Sunday we had four verses and four pages.

The prayers which Uncle Sherbrook read after the Commentary, were also composed by this Rev. Dr MacShaw. They did not ask for those things my soul longed for; and when I wanted comfort, I found they gave none. They were written in mystical language, and prayed for queer out-of-the-way people and things. The blacks were never forgotten, and there was always a great deal about Modern Babylons, Zions, and New Jerusalems. The more practical parts were in this style: "And we pray Thee, O Lord, have mercy on the rising generation, which is like grass in the wilderness; and teach our youth the error of its ways; and make those ancient cities, where the young at certain seasons do dwell, to be like the heavenly Jerusalem, whose streets are paved with gold, and her gates like the sardine stone." I supposed these cities meant Oxford and Cambridge. Uncle Sherbrook would lay great stress on the words, "teach our youth the error of its ways," and would look round at me, and then at Thomas. Aunt Jane would look round also. If poor Thomas happened to be asleep, he was afterwards reprimanded by Aunt Jane and fined a penny. I never went to sleep. Although I was not fined a penny, in reality I was more wicked than "Tummus;" for I stayed awake, yawned, and hated the Rev. Dr MacShaw! Aunt Jane and my uncle had attended the ministrations of this "Light" just about the time of their marriage, and I verily believe they had flirted over the Commentary! It is the only flirtation I can imagine my aunt to have been capable of.

It was owing to the Rev. Dr MacShaw's interpretation of the text, "They had all things common," that my uncle and aunt read the Bible verse about with their servants. It seems, many years ago, the Sherbrooks' great Light preached a sermon on this text from the pulpit of his then most fashionable chapel near Belgrave Square, and he afterwards published the edifying discourse. The whole edition was speedily sold. Aunt Jane gloried in this fact. For my part, I never felt much astonished

at the popularity of this sermon, though it was a dull one. I daresay the reverend Doctor's Belgravian admirers liked the idea of sharing the Bible with all men, better than they might have done the notion of having some other things in common with their poorer neighbours.

When my mother and I went to Sherbrook Hall, we found Mrs Stewart still at Riverbank, and not yet gone off collecting northwards. We wished she would go away, for we saw a great deal of her—a great deal more than we cared to see! She never was a favourite of mine.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart is a little, dark, piercing-eyed, pinched-together woman, who leaves on your mind the impression of a rasping voice and everlasting tatting. It is said she once tatted an aisle to a church. This meant, that she had tatted so many cap-lappets, collars, and butterflies, and sold them so well, that the money had built the aisle of a church. Ever since I knew her, I think she must have been tatting a steeple. She irritated my dear mother exceedingly by the unceasing motion of her shuttle. She would not even stop while mamma spoke to her, and she tatted while she answered. She would bring her tatting to the dinner-table, and tatt between the courses. This annoyed my uncle. The click-click of the shuttle was unsuited to the serious ceremony of dinner. I could see he thought the tatting a breach of good manners.

That "excellent, indefatigable creature, Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart," reigned over Aunt Jane like an archbishop. "She has sound Church of England principles; and I wish you would take pattern by her, Sophy, for she is always occupied in a good work, and never sits with her hands folded before her; because remember, Sophy, Satan will find work for idle hands to do."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had been left a widow with one son many years ago. Her husband—a cousin of my uncle's mother—had died in a lunatic asylum. My private opinion is—and ever will be—that Mrs Stewart had tatted away this poor man's nerves till he lost all self-command, and that she had then scolded him in her rasping voice. No wonder he died mad! I had never seen Mrs Stewart in a passion, yet I could not hear her voice and not think how cruel she must be when angry. With the exception of one old Dan, her servants would not stay with her. She was always looking for a cook—though, strange to say, she generally knew of one whom she could highly recommend. There were people who considered Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart "such a good-natured creature." She frequently got

servants for Lady Arabella Scott, and I never knew her that she had not some Christian-minded governess on hand who preferred good principles to a high salary, and for whom she wanted a really happy home in a truly pious family.

Mrs Stewart was the unpaid secretary of six excellent charities, and the paid secretary of seven still more admirable ones. Whenever and wherever you met her, she carried a small work-bag full of tatting-cotton and collecting-cards. When this best of women wanted change of air, she went on a collecting tour. Her expenses were paid. She would tell you the labourer was worthy of his hire; so she did a good work and visited her friends at the same time. She loved collecting and visiting. Bazaars were her delight: they were pleasant excitement, and not wicked like theatres and balls; they brought her into the notice of great people, and enabled her to make new acquaintances. She liked to be acquainted with "nice people"—that is, people of good position, well-off, who could entertain her. As Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart found herself habitually without a cook, she never much cared to dine at home. She was fond of society, and would pop in upon you at luncheon-time, as a pleasant surprise; and if you gave her the slightest encouragement, she would stay on till afternoon tea. She had a decided taste for tea-drinking. When she has been spending a few days in London at a hotel (on a collecting tour), I have known her go to four pious teas in one afternoon. I believe goody people did not dislike her. She was clever, and knew how to make herself useful, and would go to any amount of trouble about any thing or person she had once taken up. Her energetic mind liked interfering and managing. She was a born orderer, and yet she had tact enough only to "arrange" what she felt would let itself be arranged. She did not meddle with the impossible—and this was one secret of her success. I think she knew by instinct if you disliked her and her charities. Now she never tried to make me collect, either for her blacks or whites.

Many people thought Mrs Stewart agreeable. I never did. Then I dislike Scriptural language and a rasping voice. I also dislike a stingy woman full of little mean tricks. The admirable Catherine was not poor, though not exactly rich. It was said she was saving for her son; and certainly she never spent her money. She did not even subscribe to her own charities, though she was hardly to be blamed for not doing so when she got so much money out of other people. Aunt Jane has often told me the committee of the Society for the Promotion of Christianising Influences in the Homes of the East considered Mrs Sher-

brook-Stewart the best secretary and collector it ever had! No doubt of her talent! Her being always well dressed when necessary, was perhaps the greatest proof she could give that she really was a clever woman. In a miser, I might almost call her fashionable well-cut black silk an instinct of genius. She knew she would not be so well received by "nice people" and their servants if she looked a mere goody-body, only fit for a side-table. Wearing a loose Garibaldi and a skimping skirt, she would not have been the favourite she was with Lady Arabella Scott.

And oh! what tact Mrs Stewart showed in the choice of her bonnet! She always had three, and I might truly say that each bonnet held different views. The soundest (a very Low-Church one) was a pokey black thing, coming well over the ears, with a curtain behind and big strings before. In this bonnet the best of women collected for the conversion of French infidels. Mrs Stewart's Broader-Church bonnet was less lugubrious than this very "Low" one: though dowdy, it had a coloured feather at one side. She put it on when she came to see Aunt Jane, and I should say it held much the same views as my aunt's own buttercup tow-row.

The first time I happened to meet Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart at Mineham (Lady Arabella's country place), I must acknowledge I was taken aback. I could hardly believe my eyes. I looked again, and saw the admirable Catherine really did wear the latest French fashion, a *haute nouveauté*, perched on the top of a large chignon! "Well," said I to myself, "this is indeed the thin end of the wedge!" Mrs Stewart instantly put on a thick veil, and let it fall back over her bonnet and chignon, so that Aunt Jane noticed nothing new. I don't wonder; for with the veil on, Mrs Stewart might have been collecting for the French infidels. Mrs Stewart . . . I ought not to say Mrs Stewart; it is a positive insult! But really I cannot always be bothered giving everybody two names! I find Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart too much of a good thing when I have a Mrs Elmer-Elmer amongst my acquaintance, and a Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone for a relation. Besides, the admirable Catherine has no right to be always Sherbrooked as well as Stewarted. Her husband was a third son. Look in the 'Landed Gentry' and you will see his names put down as Charles Henry Sherbrook Gordon Stewart. I expect he had a canny Scotchwoman for a mother, who thought maybe the Gordons might leave her third son something; and that if they did not, there might just be a chance of a windfall from a Sherbrook. The poor lunatic never

called himself anything but Mr Charles Stewart, perhaps because he was a lunatic ! His widow had all her wits about her ; so when she settled at Riverbank, it was Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart- who came to live near her dear relations, the Sherbrooks of Sherbrook Hall.

No one ever exactly knew why or how the best of women came to Riverbank. My mother used to say a bitter north wind blew one day right down from Scotland and brought with it a nasty cold drizzle and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart ; while Aunt Jane considered "that excellent, indefatigable creature" had arrived under a special dispensation of Providence. I am not at all sure my uncle thought a beneficent Providence had brought this lady to the neighbourhood. Her tatting and energy made him feel uncomfortable when he was sitting still in his arm-chair during his quiet hour after dinner. She was altogether too restless and determined a woman for his taste ; and then he did not like the Sherbrook she had tacked to her Stewart. He had a great idea of his own name, and did not wish it to be stuck on to any other without his consent. It was well for the widow that her name happened to be Stewart, for my uncle would never have forgiven the impertinent adventuress who had dared to put Sherbrook before Smith, Jones, or Robinson. I cannot truthfully say my uncle actually disapproved of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, for it was nearly impossible the soundest of men could disapprove of the soundest of women when she held exactly the same views as himself ; besides, Aunt Jane managed almost to persuade him that he liked her. As for me, never for one moment did I think Providence had brought Mrs Stewart to Riverbank ! I well knew she had come there quite of her own accord. She did not stay in the north because she could not get on with the elder brothers' wives. I often heard her say, "They have their good points, and far be it from me, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, to judge them. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged. But our paths lie in different valleys. My ways are not their ways." Then came a sigh ; and Aunt Jane sighed too, and seemed to feel much edified. But I could not bear this cant ! I should have preferred to hear Mrs Stewart say : "I dislike my sisters-in-law. We do not agree, and I consider the fault is all on their side. I will go and visit them on my collecting tours, when their houses are convenient hotels ; but I hate them !" Such words would have shocked Aunt Jane, but not me, because I should have felt they were true. I could well imagine that sisters-in-law do not always love each other, and that the interfering pattern one of

a family who professes superior charity and piety, and rarely has a cook, might not always be the most popular with her husband's relations.

I am sure my mother and I wished Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had agreed with her relations in the north. We neither wanted her nor her Scotch drizzle south of the Tweed; and we sometimes had both! When the two plagues fell on a Sunday, with an early dinner, cold mutton, and extra pages of the Commentary, it was more than human nature could endure. At those rare times when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had a cook, she acted as if it were wrong for her to order dinner at home upon the seventh day. "Thou shalt do no manner of work." Aunt Jane thought it equally wrong to invite any one to her house on the Sabbath-day; but then we all know that excellent creature Catherine was no one!

If Uncle Sherbrook heard Aunt Jane say, "George, tell Thomas to lay another plate at dinner," he would exclaim, "Surely, Jane, no one is coming to dine on Sunday?" "No one, my dear Edward — no one! only Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart. Poor, dear, indefatigable creature! And she really does appreciate Dr MacShaw's admirable exposition of the Holy Scriptures. So she must stay on till after supper, that she may join in our family prayer and thanksgiving."

We had a tea-supper on Sunday at seven o'clock, and an early dinner, instead of lunch and late dinner. The Sunday bells rang at different hours from the week-day ones: we had no frightening-bell, only a dressing-bell and a supper-bell. Aunt Jane said she liked to make a difference between the Sabbath-day and the mere week-day, and Uncle Sherbrook thoroughly agreed with her.

Whenever Mrs Stewart dined at the Hall, she remained till after prayers. Had I not been intimately acquainted with this excellent person, I should have thought she came to prayers and not to dinner.

The third Sunday my mother and I spent at Sherbrook Hall was a wet day—an unsound Sabbath! for we could not get to church. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart did not mind the rain, I am sorry to say, so came early, just as if it were fine. Besides the usual extra bit of Commentary, we had Dr MacShaw's sermons going on all day long. After the evening prayer, hymn, thanksgiving, and Commentary, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart took another cup of tea, and two more slices of bread-and-butter. At length, when the admirable Catherine bade us good-night, my mother was so tired that she yawned, and answered "Amen"!

She was perfectly exhausted, and really did not know what she was saying. I had to help her up-stairs, so overcome was she with fatigue.

CHAPTER X.

My mother had never felt well since she came to Sherbrook Hall. She said she had a cold. The weather was damp and chilly, more like autumn than summer, and the house was a very cold one. Snipkins allowed no fires in August. From time to time my mother kept complaining of a pain through her chest and back.

“I know what it is, Sophia,” my aunt invariably said; “it is the liver: and you have a pain just under your right shoulder?”

“No, Jane, it is more under the left one, and in my chest, low down; it takes away my breath.”

“Exactly; I know! It has moved a little to the other side, but it will soon move back again, under the right shoulder, for it is just what I get myself.”

I have rarely known Aunt Jane to be ill; yet no matter what symptoms of disease you may have, she is certain to have had precisely the same pains before. She is a perfectly infallible physician.

I was always frightened when my mother felt ill, because I knew she had something wrong with her heart. I wanted her to let me send for the doctor, as there was really a very good one in Harefield. I thought he might order her to take the wine she had been accustomed to at home, and had been ordered to take, on account of the low action of her heart, but which Aunt Jane would not let her have. My aunt was a rigid teetotaller. She had actually taken the pledge; and because she herself had done so, she was firmly convinced all the world ought to do the same. She was infallible on the subject. Uncle Sherbrook had not taken the pledge. He drank wine in our house, but not in his own. Aunt Jane would not let him. She persuaded him it was his duty to set Harefield and his household a good example, for Aunt Jane said there was terrible drunkenness in the village. She also persuaded my uncle that abstinence from all fermented liquors was part of that water-cure by which she had been “the means, under Provi-

dence," of giving him a liver-complaint and restoring his constitution.

On those rarest of occasions when Uncle Sherbrook's household permitted him to ask a friend to dinner, I believe he took a glass of port, for good-manners' sake, after Aunt Jane had left the dining-room. He had some old sherry and some very old port in his cellar. He seemed to feel a certain pride in the age of these wines, especially in that of the old port. They were locked up in an inner cellar somewhere down-stairs—I don't know where; and the keys of this cellar, and of the one outside it, were kept with the title-deeds of Uncle Sherbrook's property: at least I always believed so, but I never dared to ask my uncle the question. Aunt Jane did not know, for Uncle Sherbrook would not tell her, where he kept the keys. I think, perhaps, he feared she might tamper with the old port—throw out the poisonous fermentation, and put water in its place. The fear was not altogether unfounded, as Aunt Jane was a perfect zealot on the subject of fermented liquors and alcoholic drinks. To please her, the admirable Catherine only drank water, and said it agreed with her better than wine.

My mother had not sufficient courage to let me send for Dr Daly in spite of Aunt Jane. My aunt and the doctor were not on speaking terms: they had fought over an old woman who had died, and they had accused each other of killing her. By rights the old woman was Dr Daly's patient, he being the dispensary doctor, for there is a sort of dispensary in Harefield. Denis's father left a sum of money in his will to found one; but it is badly supported. Aunt Jane will not subscribe to it: she says she does not see why Harefield should not be like other villages, and have no particular doctor to itself. My aunt thoroughly disapproves of Dr Daly's "system." Then she herself would like to treat the whole neighbourhood for liver-complaint, and Dr Daly has frequently interfered with her patients.

By the Tuesday after that last fatiguing Sabbath my mother was somewhat but not much rested. She said to me, "Sophy, I do not think this place quite agrees with me."

"Too much Commentary, punctuality, and tatting for your constitution, my love!" I replied.

"True enough, Sophy dear—quite true! but I could not leave without offending your Aunt Jane. We must stay our month. All we can do will be to cut off the last Sunday. We came here on a Monday, yesterday three weeks, so we might perhaps leave next Saturday. We will try and leave

next Saturday, for it is very chilly here," and she drew her shawl about her.

We were sitting in the large drawing-room : windows opening to the ground are unsuited to our damp climate. The room was very cold. "I will light a fire," I said ; "it is all nonsense dying of cold because an establishment is too well regulated."

"What would Snipkins say ? and your uncle and aunt ? Oh, Sophy, Sophy ! I implore you, don't !" My mother rose hastily from the sofa, and caught my two hands in hers. "A fire in August ! why, it is a revolution in this house ! Sophy, oh, my dear child ! I implore you, for my sake, not to make a fuss ! I really do not feel well. A fuss would tire me, and I am ill and tired now. We will go away on Saturday, and light a fire at home. Come out, Sophy," and she tried gently to drag me from the fireplace—"come out, my dear, it is much warmer out of doors ; it is not raining now, and the air will do me good."

I looked at her, and saw she was pale—paler than she had been for days. A sudden dread came over me. My mother smiled. "Sophy," she said, "don't look like that, or you will make me think I am dying ! But death, my dear, is not a little cold like mine."

"Death !" I repeated. The word somehow shocked me. "Death ! oh, my love, don't let us talk of dying when we are so full of life !" I tenderly wrapped her shawl more closely around her, and said, "Come, love,—come out ; come away from this cold, desolate room. I know you are not really ill, but it is no wonder that we talk of death when we sit here with those rows of empty chairs all standing stiffly in their cotton covers, like dead men in their winding-sheets."

The drawing-room at Sherbrook Hall was the most uncomfortable, punctiliously arranged room I ever saw in my life. The chairs were always wrapped in calico covers, and they stood in rows. The centre of desolation was a very ugly mahogany table, with one large straight leg. Tracty books, in coloured covers, with gilt edges, that nobody ever read, were placed at equal distances round this unsightly piece of furniture. Snipkins "hoverlooked" the "harranging" of the drawing-room, and "harranged" it as she thought best.

My mother and I went out, and took the path which led beside the garden-gate. We should have gone into the garden, but the gate was locked, so we sat on the lowest branch of the old beech-tree. We did not talk much. It was one of those still days in August, damp and sunless, when we notice there

are leaves already on the ground, and feel that summer will soon be gone, and that winter then must come again.

After resting a little while, we followed the winding path down into the glen. The laurels were very wet from last night's rain. They looked like King Richard's dark villains trying to smother the white fog which lay under their boughs close to the ground. I do not care for laurels: they are too thick and gloomy, and shut out the light of heaven like wicked souls, and there is a strange damp smell hanging in the air wherever they grow. It felt so cold in the glen, that we did not go on to the path over the hill, but turned to our left, up the narrow gravel-walk which leads to Aunt Jane's own summer-house—a crockery-rockery-shell-and-pebble place, with a text of Scripture in small white stones over the entrance: "Enter ye in at the strait gate." This text always amused my mother and me. We began talking of Aunt Jane's want of the sense of the ridiculous, then of the sanctimonious Snipkins family, and so on to the Commentary and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart—all more or less amusing subjects for a pair of ladies to fall to gossiping about. My mother brightened up. I, seeing this, let fly my tongue and talked, . . . talked as if I had two people within me, and each person had two tongues. It would be hard to say how long we sat gossiping in the summer-house.

At last, as luck would have it, I began speaking of the Sherbrooks' endless bells—the warning-bell, the frightening-bell—and this made us think it might perhaps be near one o'clock. My mother found that by her watch it only wanted five minutes to the serious hour of lunch. I proposed taking a short cut home over the grass: it was so closely mown that we could not have wet our feet. We were little more than a hundred yards from the house as the crow flies: going over the lawn was like stepping from the head to the tail of a partly coiled serpent, while the winding walk was like following every twist of the creature's body. But my poor mother had not the courage to dash across the grass in full sight of the dining-room windows.

She said—and nothing could be more true—"Jane and Edward would be seriously upset by a footprint on their well-kept lawn;" and then added, laughing, "I fancy they think Satan might walk up and down on the grass in front of the house if they were not particular about the right-of-way." I was delighted to see my dear mother in good spirits again. She leant on my arm, and we set off, walking rather briskly down-hill to the glen; and when down one little hill, we went up the other perhaps too quickly, for my mother felt out of breath and

coughed. She complained of a pain in her chest; yet she wanted to hurry on, fearing to be late: but I made her rest in the branches of the beech-tree by the garden-gate. "Punctuality will be the death of you!" I exclaimed, forcing her to obey me and sit down. I did not now feel alarmed by her weakness and cough, neither did she. When you have been talking in an energetic manner, your heart beats with such fulness of life that you think neither of danger nor dying.

My mother, lying back in the green boughs of the tree, rested some ten minutes at least. She soon recovered breath, and would have gone on quickly to the house,—only, finding it was past one o'clock, we both agreed that if we were sinners at all, we might as well be big as little ones. Being late, ten minutes later would make but slight difference in the heinousness of the great offence. We strolled home at our leisure, chatting as we went along. The under-gardener was rolling the lawn. My mother laughed quite heartily, and wondered whose footprints he was obliterating. We spoke of Uncle Sherbrook's right-of-way mania. "Do you suppose," said I, "if Uncle Sherbrook really did see the devil trespassing on his smooth turf, that he would send for Mr Boggle?" And we both agreed he would. My mother laughed at the idea till she got a fit of coughing. She said her cough came from nervousness. "Ah yes!" I exclaimed; "you feel you are now under the very eyes of the dining-room windows. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart sees us. She is telling Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook." My mother quite trembled. She was very much afraid of her brother-in-law.

"Follow me!" I cried. Perceiving one of the dining-room windows was not really closed, I pushed it open. We walked in. Aunt Jane gave a little scream; George Snipkins dropped a spoon, and Thomas upset the gravy-boat. Who before had ever been seen coming in through a window at Sherbrook Hall?

"We are late, I fear," said I; "but—but never mind, Aunt Jane."

"You never do seem to mind, Sophy—or Sophia either. How late you are!" replied my aunt, querulously.

Uncle Sherbrook sat with his back to the window. He looked round at us steadily, severely. I felt uncomfortable under his gaze: he turned and went on eating in silence.

"Come, come!" cried Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, crossly; "I don't wonder your aunt and uncle are annoyed, Sophy. Mrs Thursley, shut the window, and pray sit down. If you loiter any longer, there will be nothing left. I have nearly finished everything."

"So I see, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart," I said. I went near her, and added in a whisper, "*Bon appétit surtout! Renards n'en manquent point.*" In reply, the admirable Catherine threw daggers at me from her small black eyes.

"What is that, Sophy?" asked Aunt Jane; "for I am sure you are saying something very rude to Catherine."

"Only a French proverb," I answered.

"Oh yes, only a French proverb!" retorted my aunt. "I know indeed; something dreadful you learnt from that Mossiou Tolang! But my advice was never taken in that matter, or I will say you might have been very different from what you are. As to that Mossiou Tolang, now, Catherine, would you believe it? He is a French Papist, and"—&c., &c., &c., &c., &c.—on she went. I did not listen.

It is a relief, when you expect to be scolded for a particular fault, to find you only get a pointless reprimand for all your sins together, and it is better still when the reproving tongue takes a turn at finding fault with all the world. I was relieved to hear Aunt Jane reprove Monsieur Tolain instead of me. It did the little man no harm.

Uncle Sherbrook's awful silence had a great deal more effect on my nerves than Aunt Jane's scolding. If I am angry, I cannot hold my tongue, so I am exceedingly afraid of silent wrath. It is a power I feel unable to cope with. I know my mother was like me in this. She dreaded the bilious silence. My uncle looked at mamma, and pointed to the empty chair at his right hand. She took it, and began a trembling apology. Uncle Sherbrook silenced her by a wave of his hand and a shake of his head. He looked "No apology!"

My mother seemed quite unable to eat. She leant back, and I saw her turn pale as if in pain, and gasp for breath. I should have liked to give her some wine, for she seemed faint; but there was none, and my mother would never have forgiven me had I asked for some of Uncle Sherbrook's old port. The pain soon passed away, and my mother recovered her breath. "Edward, Edward," she said, "do not be angry." And I said to my uncle, "Her pain delayed us on our way home." Uncle Sherbrook ate on in silence.

"Her pain! What pain?" asked Aunt Jane, leaving her seat, and coming round to my mother's side. "That pain she has had so often of late in her chest and side," said I.

"Ah!" replied Aunt Jane, "I know; it is the liver. I often have a pain exactly like it myself. It is mere indigestion, and

the pain is always worst under the right shoulder." My aunt said this with as perfect a conviction of her own infallibility as ever.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart quite agreed with Aunt Jane. "Believe me, Mrs Thursley," she said, "you have a mere indigestion. Don't dawdle about with Sophy, but go out by yourself, and take a good, quick walk. It is no use coddling one's self for a stitch in the side." I did not think much of Mrs Stewart's medical opinion, for I had had occasion once or twice before to remark that the best of women, though blessed with a constitution of iron, never liked any one to be petted or considered ill but herself. She was a jealous person, and liked to be first in all things.

As my mother did not care to eat, and her illness and Uncle Sherbrook's silence quite took away my appetite, grace was said just at the same time it would have been had we come home before the warning-bell. This return to punctuality somewhat appeased my uncle's wrath, for on leaving the dining-room he said to my mother, with a certain severity of manner, and yet not ~~ruefully~~, "Perhaps, Sophia, if you are not well, you had better ~~go~~ to bed." And he passed on into his study.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart appeared to have changed her mind all of a sudden. Instead of continuing to recommend the good, quick walk, she strongly urged my mother to take Uncle Sherbrook's advice and go to bed. I had reason to believe this excellent lady was anxious to get rid of us in one way or another, and did not much care how. Her own brown horse had fallen lame from weakness brought on by over-starvation. Mrs Stewart had walked from Riverbank—a long two miles—and now she wanted to get Aunt Jane and the carriage all to herself, for she liked tatting with her face to the horses. I remembered this was collecting Tuesday—a day on which the best of women visited some farmers' wives three miles off, preaching to them, and collecting sixpences for Lady Arabella's blacks, and butter and eggs for herself.

Mrs Stewart wanted Aunt Jane to start immediately, but my aunt would not do so until she had put my mother to bed herself. Robert Jones and the horses were actually kept waiting ten minutes at the door. My aunt was thus delayed, because she insisted on winding a cold wet bandage round her sister's waist, bringing it exactly underneath the right shoulder where the pain ought to be, and would be soon again.

I found my mother shivering, and yet in vain did I beg her to let me take off the cold bandage. "No, no, Sophy," she

said ; "when your aunt comes in, she will only put it on again, and I have not the energy to argue with her. She talks so much, and I like to be quiet. Put my fur cloak on my bed, and perhaps I may go to sleep."

Such lethargy alarmed me, and I thought it a sad misfortune for a yielding invalid to fall into the hands of an infallible doctor. "At all events, I will light a fire," said I.

"No, no!" cried my mother, raising herself in bed ; "not without your Aunt Jane's leave. What would Snipkins say?"

I slipped from the room while my mother was still speaking, and running down-stairs, found the carriage had started. There it was, creeping along the avenue. I ran across the grass and overtook it. Aunt Jane's head came popping out of one window, exclaiming, "Why, there's Sophy! Shocking, disobedient girl! She has run across the grass! Stop, Robert, while I speak to her!" I heard Mrs Stewart's penetrating voice say inside the carriage, "She does not mind what you say to her, Mrs Sherbrook: make her uncle reprove her, I advise you."

"Stop, Robert, stop!" cried I, for he had not minded Aunt Jane. Robert pulled up and turned upon me a look of amazement. So did Thomas. Even the horses turned round their heads and looked. They were not in the habit of stopping on this part of the avenue.

"What is it? what is it?" seemed to burst from carriage, horses, ladies, servants, all in one breath. "What is it?"

"May I light a fire in my mother's room?" I heard Thomas repeating my words to Robert on the box, and the coachman grumbling in return, "'Ad I knowed it was only that, I would not 'ave stopped on this 'ere 'ill."

"Really, Sophy," said Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, "if that is all you have to say, you might have come round by the avenue, and not have walked upon the grass. Mr Sherbrook will be much displeased."

"But may I light the fire, Aunt Jane? Answer quickly, quickly! or I will light it without leave," cried I, out of all patience.

"What impertinence!" said Mrs Stewart.

"Child! child!" exclaimed my aunt ; "what will become of you?" And she put up her hands at me like a deprecating saint. The window was down. I seized one hand and held it tightly so as to rivet her attention.

"May I, or may I not, light a fire?"

"In the month of August?"

"My mother is ill."

"A mere indigestion," put in Mrs Stewart. I pressed my aunt's hand in mine.

"Think, think, Aunt Jane, before you say no!"

"What will Snipkins say?" cried my aunt.

"Snipkins!" I repeated, in a voice of scorn. I believe I gave poor Aunt Jane's hand a violent squeeze, just as if I had had Snipkins under my thumb. She screamed and called out, "Dreadful, headstrong child! Go away and do what you like; only you must ask Snipkins if you may tell Elizabeth to tell Maria to light the fire. Now mind you ask Snipkins first! Do you hear? Sophy, do you hear?"

I was quite determined to hear no more, so I took to my heels and ran back across the grass. "Come off the grass! come off the grass!" kept ringing in the air behind me. When I got to a safe distance I looked back, and saw my aunt's head out of one window, and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's out of the other. I should say both ladies were talking, for Thomas appeared to be laughing heartily.

I laughed too, and for the moment I laughed away all anxiety. Such a fuss about nothing! Little things were certainly not little things at Sherbrook Hall! I nearly tumbled over two crows in front of the house: they were so accustomed to have the grass plat all to themselves, that they would not get out of my way till the very last instant, and then off they flew with a loud caw. Two well-regulated crows! Just like the two Sherbrooks! They cawed at a novelty, and trespassers were an abomination to their soul!

Snipkins had come to Sherbrook Hall a very long time ago as Aunt Jane's own maid. She had grown imperceptibly into a sort of housekeeper: she kept the keys, peeped into every room, and was to be met all over the house. Her time was fully occupied in fussing, interfering, and talking. Satan finds no mischief for such hands to do, because he sees they find quite enough for themselves without his help. Snipkins was a cunning gossip: her great command of Scriptural language made her conversation acceptable to Aunt Jane, notwithstanding her aspirating tongue. Often and often have I been told it would be well for me if I had the Bible at my finger-ends like Snipkins. This very superior person could even talk gossip in a way that was not scandalous, but devout. Had you only leant one ear to her tales, you might have thought she was discussing the domestic affairs of Abraham and Sarah.

When first Snipkins came to Aunt Jane, I know she arrived

alone, and with little luggage but the letter *h* and some texts of Scripture. Before long she managed to fill the house and place with her relations. The whole Snipkins family, even the nieces and cousins, were very pious people. Aunt Jane often told me how fortunate she was, under Providence, in getting a maid to whom high wages were no attraction.

“Sophy,” said my aunt, constantly, “when I hired Snipkins, she told me she did not care for my high wages, but that she would come to me for the good of her soul, as she heard I kept a Christian household; and it was very pleasant to me to hear this.”

I believe the lady’s-maid’s numerous relations also came to Sherbrook Hall for the good of their souls.

I ran up-stairs to Aunt Jane’s dressing-room, so that I might discover Snipkins’s whereabouts from her niece. As the very superior person had no time to spare, her niece Harriet “helped,” and kept Aunt Jane’s “things in order.” Nieces were an institution at Sherbrook Hall. There was a Maria besides Harriet. Maria was helping-niece to Elizabeth Snipkins the house-maid, and Elizabeth herself was the widow of a poor relation of Aunt Jane’s own maid. The nieces arrived early in the morning; at night, Harriet went home to the front lodge, and Maria to the back gate. Snipkins’s sister, Emma, the cook, did not make use of a niece. She had a kitchen-maid and her share of the “general helper” instead. These drudges had real work to do, so they did not belong to the ruling family.

George Snipkins, the butler (a perfectly invaluable man, and so punctual!), possessed an invisible underling—a boy hardly ever to be seen, because he did not wear livery. This invisible underground Bill “helped,” and cleaned the plate when Thomas went out with the carriage. Harriet generally knew where her aunt could be found. Snipkins, it appeared, was in the housekeeper’s room down-stairs at dinner with the chief priests of her tribe. Harriet positively gasped with fright when I asked her to go and tell Snipkins to have a fire lighted in my mother’s room.

“Lor, Miss Sophy! Lor!” she exclaimed, in a piteous voice; “there’s nothing I would not do for you, but Lor! Miss Sophy, don’t hast me to disturb Miss Snipkins at her dinner.”

“There, there, Harriet!” I said; “don’t cry and be silly. I will tell Snipkins myself. Will she be sure to have the keys of the coal-cellars?”

“Yes, miss; but——”

"But what?"

"I fear there'll be none but cook's coals in the cellar."

"Any coals will do."

"Lor,-Miss Sophy, whatever will Miss Hemmer say? Mrs Helizabeth won't dare to touch Miss Hemmer's coals!"

"Miss Hemmer! Mrs Helizabeth! Stuff and nonsense!" cried I, and off I ran.

Snipkins was very angry at being disturbed at her dinner,—the more so, perhaps, as she happened to be entertaining some friends, and she may not have liked my seeing the strangers, followers being strictly forbidden in Uncle Sherbrook's household.

When Snipkins heard Aunt Jane had given leave for a fire to be lighted in my mother's room, she was filled with righteous indignation.

"Mrs Sherbrook's leave his nothing, Miss Sophia Thursley. Hit is Mrs Sherbrook's personal hundoubted horders I must 'ave. Hit is not for you, Miss Sophia, to be ha-getting hof Mrs Sherbrook's horders, and ha-dividing of a 'ouse hagainst hitself. A 'ouse divided hagainst hitself cannot stand."

Snipkins's air of dignified pomposity caricatured Aunt Jane's. The maid imitated her mistress in many little ways. She wore a set of brown ringlets at each side of her sanctimonious face, and a twist of hair behind, with falling white lappets of elaborate crochet. When my aunt went into mourning, Snipkins put on a black dress; at other times she wore a brown shot-silk made after one of Madame Julie's patterns. She was stout and florid, and looked so very sleek and comfortable, that had you merely passed her in the hall or on the stairs, you might have exclaimed, "What a motherly good-natured sort of woman!"

"Fires in Horgus," continued Snipkins, "hare contrary to the rules hof this hestablishment, and rules hare the principle, the rock, which I uphold, Miss Thursley."

"Snipkins," I asked, "is it you who are to give Mrs Sherbrook orders? or is it Mrs Sherbrook who is to give her orders to you?" The goodly-godly woman got very angry.

"Hi'll hanswer no himpertinent questions, Miss Sophia Thursley, and hif you give me hany himpertinence——"

"Snipkins!" I said.

"Yes, Miss Sophia, call me what bad names you like, but hi'll complain you to your aunt. Mrs Sherbrook knows right well as 'ow you're not hagoing hin hat the strait and narror gate which leads to heverlasting salvation. Hoften and hoften 'as your haunt sat down and bemoaned your backslidings to me, Miss Sophia!"

I was sure this was quite true, so I did not vouchsafe a reply, but turned to Elizabeth, the housemaid, and asked her to have the fire lighted for me, and quickly, as my mother was ill. Elizabeth pushed out her chair and got up.

"Who dares hupset the harrangements hof my 'ousehold!" screamed Snipkins. "Helizabeth, if you go ha-follering hof Miss Thursley's horders, who 'as no right to give hany, hi'll just 'ave you and your trunk packed off hafore morning."

The housemaid wavered.

"Hi'll just tell Mrs Sherbrook," continued Snipkins, "'ow ha respectable widder like yourself went ha-visiting last Sabbath hevening contrary to Mr Sherbrook's very most partikler horders. . . ."

"Miss Snipkins, Miss Snipkins! don't ruin me!" gasped Elizabeth, and sat down again. The housemaid's abject fear astonished me.

The end of it all was, that I went into the kitchen myself, found three maids there, told them all to look the other way, and seizing the coal-scuttle, dragged it as best I could up-stairs. I stopped at the top of the back-stairs, for I heard a noise in my uncle's dressing-room, and his own voice calling for his portmanteau. I peeped cautiously, saw no one coming, so slipped across the passage, and smuggled the coal-scuttle into my mother's room without any unpleasant adventure.

My mother's terror at seeing the coal-scuttle in my hand was so great that she would hardly let me light the fire. She declared she was quite well, and did not want a fire. I lighted it all the same. My mother would have died of cold sooner than brave Snipkins. She feared the tyrant who had supreme power over Aunt Jane, because she knew by experience what a misery this superior person could make life to you at Sherbrook Hall. Snipkins did not wish Aunt Jane to have people staying in the house, so took good care to make them uncomfortable. I think she particularly disliked relations—fearing, perhaps, they might become fixtures, "for hever hinterfering and ha-bringing hof strange maids hamongst people who does not want none of their hairs." Though Aunt Jane always brought Snipkins to our house, we dared not take a maid to hers. We once took an unfortunate Fanny to Sherbrook Hall; and when we went away, this poor girl's character was left behind, and she never got it back again. Snipkins accused her of every crime under the sun, from pilfering to walking on the county road with a soldier upon the Sabbath-day.

"Sophy," said my mother, "write home, and say we shall

leave this on Saturday, and by the early train. The earlier the better. And mind, Sophy, my dear, you write immediately, or your aunt will come in and shut the post-bag; you know she always will shut it half an hour too soon."

I ran off down to the library, where there was an old table in a corner, on which people like Sophy were allowed to write. A spot of ink in my own room or in the drawing-room was a capital offence.

On my way through the hall, I met George Snipkins's underground helper carrying a portmanteau.

"A portmanteau!" I cried, all astonishment. "Good heavens! what can be the matter?"

"Master," said the boy, grinning from ear to ear—"master's bin and forgot he was to dine with them 'lectioneering gentlemen this very night in Vottingham, and when the mistress gets out of the carriage, master's to get in, and the mistress she don't know it, nor Mr Jones neither."

"What! not even know it? And they have not come in! I hope they will be late. What delightful excitement!" cried I.

"The master, miss, is a-drinking a cup of coffee in the study."

"Taking coffee in the study!" I repeated, almost with a scream. "Heavens! and without a warning-bell!"

There were sounds all through the dull house—a noise of living, talking people. "This is delightful," thought I.

I heard Snipkins calling out to Harriet to get a label for Mr Sherbrook's portmanteau, and Elizabeth giving orders over the banister to Maria to tell Bill to bring back the portmanteau, as George had forgotten to put in Mr Sherbrook's evening shoes.

When I had written my letter, and went to put it in the post-bag, I found Uncle Sherbrook pacing up and down the outer hall, all coated and hatted, and looking at the watch he held open in his hand. I thought, should I speak to him? No; I thought I had better not. He is put out at having forgotten this dinner. An infallible should not forget. I see he is angry—I meant to say, bilious; it was a slip of the tongue—for, as I well knew, Uncle Sherbrook had never been angry since the day he married Aunt Jane.

I took down the post-bag unobserved, and was replacing it on its own particular shelf, when my uncle chanced to look up from his watch and see me.

"Sophy," he exclaimed, testily, "don't speak to me; you

will fuss me. I never get into a fuss myself; but when you come running after me and mislaying everything belonging to me, I declare I almost feel as if I might lose my temper."

Uncle Sherbrook had his fits of bilious talking as well as his fits of bilious silence.

He kept on talking, and saying ladies were all alike, and always fussy, and always losing everything. "And I am sure I have never travelled with your aunt that she did not lose my little black bag—as if she had anything to say to that bag, when she has her own hand-bag, and her brown shawl, and her umbrella!—but no! she must come fussing about my black bag; and Snipkins . . . even Snipkins fusses me! Now, now, Sophy, run away. I can't have you fussing me; I can't stand it. I am going to Vottingham on important election business. I may have to make a speech, and I don't want my mind disturbed."

I was scampering away as quickly as I could go, but I had not got half-way up-stairs before my uncle called me back in a stentorian voice.

"Take this key to George instantly—instantly! Do you hear, Sophy? Tell him I gave the wrong key. This is the right one. See that he locks the portmanteau, and then bring the key back to me—to me! Do you hear?—to me!"

"Yes, yes, Uncle Sherbrook—yes!"

He shouted after me, "Sophy, don't lose the key! don't lose the key!"

When I returned, my uncle was in his study. He sent me flying off to underground Bill with a message for Mr Boggle—a most important one, which was to be despatched immediately, immediately!

"And mind, do not loiter, Sophy. I wish to know the exact moment you give the letter and William starts."

When I came back again, I was told to run down the avenue and see if the carriage were in sight; and if I met it, I was to tell Robert to drive up to the house quickly, quickly! I hastened to obey, delighted to escape from my uncle.

I had run a hundred yards, but not on the grass, when I heard his voice calling loudly after me. He stood on the door-step, waving Aunt Jane's garden-hat. I had not the courage to pretend I was deaf, so I was forced to hear and run back to the house. I was quite out of breath.

"Sophy," said my uncle, impatiently, "how slow you are! You would irritate any one. Put on this hat; for if you do not meet the carriage on the avenue, you may find it in the village at Smith's shop. Your aunt always keeps the carriage

waiting outside that shop, and the bay mare caught her last bad cold there."

Uncle Sherbrook stuck the hat on my head. Such a hat! with a border in front and big strings.

"What are you standing there for, Sophy? Run away this moment, and leave me in peace. I never was more fussed in my life—not even by your aunt and Snipkins."

The front avenue at Sherbrook Hall is fully a mile long. When I got to the gate, I saw the carriage outside coming towards me at a foot's-pace. I rejoiced to think I should not have to walk through the village in Aunt Jane's garden-hat. I beckoned to the coachman, hoping to hurry him, but without effect. Robert was walking the horses up the Simplon. My mother and I had given that name to one of Robert's hills, an almost imperceptible rise in the ground about fifty yards from the lodge. The horses knew the Simplon.

The carrier-pigeon's life I had led the last two hours, flying about with messages, had tired me out. I felt no inclination to argue with Aunt Jane, and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart might have insulted me with impunity.

Sophy standing all alone at the lodge-gate caused a burst of astonishment. "What is she doing? Where is she going to all alone at this hour? The dressing-bell will ring before she is back at the house. And my garden-hat on her head!—and if she has not crumpled the border and nearly torn out one string! What will the headstrong girl do next?"

"Whatever she ought not to do, Mrs Sherbrook."

I let the two ladies talk away their first excitement. At length they perceived I was silent, and bade me speak. I told my errand in few words, and desired Robert to drive home quickly. The carriage drove off—a buzz of excitement inside and outside. Can horses who have gone six miles go six miles more if the coachman did not know beforehand the master was going to dine in Vottingham? Can the infallible wife of an infallible man believe she or her husband could forget the day of an election dinner? Accidents were so unusual at Sherbrook Hall that an unforeseen event was like Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*—a revolution in the realm! Oh, how great are little things to little minds in little places!

I had the pleasure of being too late for my uncle's departure. Uncle Sherbrook and Mrs Stewart passed me on the avenue. They drove quickly, but not too quickly for me to catch the words, "Sophy's footsteps on the lawn." Who could mistake the admirable Catherine's voice?

As I drew near the house, Aunt Jane stood on the gravel-sweep shading her eyes with her hand and watching the carriage. When it reached the turn in the avenue, Aunt Jane ambled forwards like an ancient pony, and stood on the grass, so that her eyes might follow it round the corner. I remained on the gravel. I could hear my aunt lamenting aloud that Edward had not ordered his bed beforehand at the Vottingham Hotel, and wondering if he would catch his death of cold.

“My dear Aunt Jane,” said I, “you are far more likely to catch cold than he, for your feet are wet. I am sure they are wet, standing on that dreadful grass.”

My aunt looked down at her boots, and realised that she stood upon the well-kept lawn. She looked back at me and blushed—actually blushed! And she was not like my mother; she hardly ever blushed.

I saw her conscience reproached her severely; so I turned away to hide a smile, and walking to the house, I left this great sinner to grapple alone with her remorse and repent in private. Well, thought I, at any rate there is one comfort—she will soon again become infallible and without reproach.

When I told my mother that my uncle and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had gone away, and were not coming back, she felt so very much better that she insisted on getting up. She said Snipkins hated people to stay in bed, as it gave trouble. However, she was not strong enough to come down to dinner; for when she tried to walk down-stairs, she felt so ill and weak that she had to go back to her room again.

Both Aunt Jane and I were late for dinner. “How odd!” we exclaimed, almost in one breath; “why, we must have mistaken the frightening-bell for the dressing-bell.” Aunt Jane made a sort of apology which seemed to be addressed to me, but which in reality was intended for George Snipkins. My aunt certainly did feel very much afraid of her servants. Our unpunctuality had annoyed the butler.

After dinner, I proposed we should sit round the fire in my mother’s room and have the tea brought up-stairs. This was a new doctrine, and a hard one for Aunt Jane to receive. The possibility of not taking tea in the drawing-room after dinner had never occurred to her. At last I persuaded her to do this new and startling thing. I never should have succeeded had not the regularity of my aunt’s mind been disturbed by the unlooked-for event of the day. There was Edward dining at Vottingham, when this time last night he had fully expected to be dining at home. What an upset to a well-regulated mind!

I carried the tea-table myself up-stairs from the drawing-room. I was almost tempted to take a much lighter table there was in the study, but I feared the shock might be too much for my aunt's nerves. Had I displaced anything in the sacred room, she might have thought me capable of making away with the "title-deeds," or of burning my uncle's will—or rather, I should say, wills; for I believe there were always two or three wills in the study. I know my uncle was fond of making his will; and a suitable and lively pastime it was for a man of his nature, and with his taste for attorneys and the law.

We poked up the fire, drew in our chairs, drank hot tea, and warmed our feet quite comfortably. Aunt Jane was very lively for her; the exciting events of the day had raised her circulation. My aunt loved a change, though she did not know it; on the contrary, she bemoaned our sad loneliness, and imagined herself to be in low spirits.

"Poor dear Edward, how lonely we are without him! And how unfortunate that Catherine's horse should be laid up at present! Edward was to drop her at Riverbank on his way. He will keep the carriage at Vottingham, and return in it himself, as Robert knows of a good stable quite near the hotel where he can put up the horses; so we shall not see Catherine till we can send her home again, because she cannot walk both ways, for it is really too much for her. But whatever will she do? And without a cook! Poor, dear, excellent, indefatigable creature!"

Neither my mother nor I could pretend to be unhappy. My mother brightened up and seemed to feel at her ease. There was no bilious silence to make her awkward, or Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart to irritate her nerves. It is only when you have been domesticated with superfluous energy, a rasping voice, and a tatting-shuttle, that you can understand the joy you would feel at being unexpectedly relieved of a woman who was tatting a steeple, and collecting for thirteen charitable associations as well.

I never knew Aunt Jane cast so little bread upon the waters, or give forth so few words in season. My mother's one sin during the day had been unpunctuality, and my two, unpunctuality and treading on the grass. Now, luckily for us, Aunt Jane had walked upon the lawn, and mistaken the frightening-bell for the dressing-bell. And then, did not my aunt look forward to a rare treat when the clock should strike ten? Would not she be sole officiating divine this night? Would not she have the Commentary all to herself? and what was to pre-

vent her from reading the servants two hymns if she wished ? She knew Snipkins thought she read them "ha-most beautiful." Aunt Jane was in great good-humour.

Yet I do not mean to say we nestled together like three sweet doves cooing in unison. My aunt could not talk to her sister without "arguing." She hoped the Conservative candidate would be returned for the county, and she prophesied that if the Radicals got a majority in the next Parliament, England would be a province of Rome in ten years' time. When my mother had drunk some hot tea, she felt lively enough to prophesy against Rome and in favour of the Protestant religion and Liberal party.

The fire became very low during Aunt Jane's longest prophecy; and so pleased was my aunt with her own political and prophetic sagacity, that she actually gave mamma leave to ring for more coals. No one answered the bell. This did not astonish me. Aunt Jane did not propose that we should ring again. She made no remark when I took up the coal-scuttle and walked out of the room.

This time I went straight to the kitchen, avoiding the passage which led to the housekeeper's room. Imagine my disgust to find the kitchen-fire raked out, the large and small scuttles empty, and not a piece of coal to be seen anywhere ! The kitchen-maid came in from the scullery. She called out, "Miss Hemmer ! Miss Hemmer !" to see if the cook happened to be anywhere near. Getting no answer, she walked close up to me and whispered in my ear, as if we had been surrounded by listeners, "Miss Snipkins has been and locked up Miss Hemmer's coals in the cellar, and has taken the key in her pocket down to the front lodge." I inquired when she would return. "Lor, Miss Sophy ! she won't be back this night. She is a-going to stay with Mr Francis at the lodge till morning. They are to have a black gentleman, and cheese macaroni—for I saw Miss Hemmer making it—and prayers, and" . . . the kitchen-maid looked round and lowered her voice still more . . . "and beer." The Snipkins family were supposed to be rigid teetotallers.

I went in search of William, the underground boy. No power of persuasion, not even a half-crown, could induce him to take a message to Snipkins at the front lodge.

I returned to my mother's room empty-handed. Aunt Jane was surprised to hear Snipkins had gone to meet a black gentleman and spend the night at the lodge. As I did not wish to make unnecessary mischief, I kept silence on the subject of the macaroni and the beer. My aunt seemed annoyed to find

her maid was spending the night abroad without even having gone through the form of asking leave. But on second thoughts, she came to the conclusion that the negro missionary—"I am sure, Sophy, he is a missionary"—had arrived unexpectedly in the village; and Snipkins, I daresay, received a message from her brother while we were in the dining-room; and Snipkins is so thoughtful, she never would interrupt me at dinner; and indeed, I am very glad Snipkins went—she has a good memory, and will be able to tell me what the missionary said. I must say James Sherbrook is remiss in many ways, for as rector of the parish he should have inquired about this African wanderer; and I am sure Catherine would have helped him to organise a lecture in the schoolroom."

"Yes, I am sure she would," said I; "but I think the Reverend James likes organising his own affairs himself."

"Sophy, Sophy!" exclaimed my aunt; "a parish is a vineyard in which many should labour, for many are called: but really I can argue with you no longer, because I must go downstairs immediately and prepare the books for prayers; but you need not follow me till five minutes to ten."

As I fully intended to skip the Commentary, I ignored this last remark. I tried, but in vain, to bring my aunt back to coal-scuttles and Snipkins. I followed her all along the lobby, begging her to send George for the key of the coal-cellar. The only answer I could get was, "I daresay Snipkins disapproves of your having a fire on the 30th of August; and I think she is right, because if you insist on keeping Sophia too warm, she will certainly catch fresh cold when she goes out again, for too much heat always makes one delicate. Sophia had better go to bed, and I will come and put on her bandages after prayers."

"You will kill her, Aunt Jane," I said—"you will kill her with those dripping bandages."

"Child, child! did not I cure her in one night when she got that sudden attack rather more than a year ago? though I will allow I was alarmed then, for she had every symptom of severe internal inflammation."

"Not a bit of it, Aunt Jane!" I cried. "All imagination! She was perfectly well—never was better in her life!"

I told Aunt Jane we had played a trick upon her—that mamma had gone to bed that time, because she was afraid of meeting her and my uncle at dinner, after having run away from the Tuttertons'. Aunt Jane said she could believe anything of us both, especially of me, but that nothing I or any one else could say would ever make her believe the symptoms of disease were the

symptoms of good health. She had been the means employed, under Providence, to cure my mother of severe internal inflammation, of aggravated indigestion, and she had done so entirely by the judicious application of the cold compress. Great doctors like my aunt never cure any but mortal maladies.

Aunt Jane's tongue was now set going in a hopeless manner. She turned round on each step of the stairs and described how she and her wet bandages had delivered "Edward's" mortal coil from the most terrible disorders. I may truly say there was a deathbed to every three steps of the staircase. Had I believed but half Aunt Jane said, I should have thought Uncle Sherbrook had died at least six times, and been brought to life again by a wet bandage on the day of his funeral.

My aunt talked on, on, on. I leant over the banisters and talked too. I thought if Aunt Jane took a long breath she would hear me speaking, and would listen, and I would seize the opportunity and turn her thoughts away from doctoring and wet bandages. But I verily believe she never drew breath until she was seated in the drawing-room. Indeed she may even then have continued talking to herself. As I did not follow her down-stairs, how do I know she held her tongue?

I need hardly add that Aunt Jane gained her point. She positively refused to go to bed until she had wrapped her sister in wet bandages.

CHAPTER XI.

The night of this 30th of August was one of the coldest ever known for the time of year. There had been thunderstorms all over the country; heavy rain fell at midnight. My mother awoke coughing violently, and awoke me in the chill of the early morning. It was light enough for me to notice the burning colour on her cheek. She complained of a pain like a dagger stabbing through her chest and back. She sat up in bed and leant her head against my shoulder. I saw with horror that her handkerchief was spotted with blood—dark clotted blood. I felt her hands; they were burning, and yet she shivered. I took off those wet bandages and threw them to the other end of the room. Aunt Jane did not know how to put them on properly. The very sheets and blankets were wet,

"Sophy," said my mother, "I feel there is inflammation in my chest. I know we can find no remedies in this house;" and these words set her coughing again.

"You are spitting blood!" cried I.

"A doctor! Send for Dr Daly!" she gasped, and fell back exhausted.

I dressed in trembling haste. My mother lay with her eyes closed. She opened them and said, "I am better, dear child—I am better now. Do not awake your aunt. I will sleep while you are gone." She coughed again, but not much; the violence of the fit seemed past.

"Sleep, and you will soon again be well, my love," I said—"well before this day is over." But my voice sounded strange in my own ear, as if my words were unreal—as if they lied and I knew it.

I went out of the room, and stopped and listened at the door to the loud breathing within. I hesitated to leave my mother alone. Would to God I could send a messenger! I knew George Snipkins was not good-natured; besides, he would refuse to go for Dr Daly without an express order from Aunt Jane: and if a Snipkins would not go, who else would dare? I foresaw that hours might be lost.

On going down-stairs I found every door locked, so I opened one of the drawing-room windows and went out upon the lawn. It was no longer raining, and the sun was breaking through the morning mist. I had never been out at this fresh hour before. For one short instant I stood still, struck by the beauty of the early morning. The hill and the more distant trees were still shrouded in a blue haze. The leaves hung heavy with rain upon the boughs, like the wet eyelashes of the mourner who has wept himself to sleep the night before. There is a moment, half sleep, half wakefulness, when the eyes seem dreaming on beneath the opening lids; and there is an hour of stillness, half of dream, when the summer day awakes after a rainy, troubled night,—when there is a sort of hush, of lullaby—a warbling of birds, a long-breathed sigh awaking into life and song. It was but for a moment that I stopped, and then walked on as if deaf and blind; and then ran, thinking I was not going fast enough.

I feared I should never arouse them at the lodge. At last the astonished Harriet opened the door. I was determined to get the house-keys from Snipkins. Harriet, whispering, bade me go into the parlour. There I found Aunt Jane's maid snoring in a chair, her dress all tumbled, her curls dishevelled,

and her crochet lappets lying on the floor. The table was strewn with black bottles and glasses, some standing, some upset. I recollect one half-empty glass fell upon the ground, and the contents bespattered my dress. The smell of beer was sickening. Coming in from the open air, this close den seemed to me like a plague-spot on this beautiful world.

Snipkins's face was flushed, and she slept heavily. I found it impossible to awake her. I even shook her, though there was something about the woman which made me shrink from touching her. At length I lost patience; so putting my hand into her pocket I took out the keys, and with them I pulled out two letters. As I put back the letters, I remember noticing one was directed to Uncle Sherbrook, and the other to Aunt Jane.

It was not till long afterwards that it struck me I had tried to awaken Snipkins from a drunken sleep.

I ran on through the sleeping village to the doctor's house. When I had rung and knocked, and waited what seemed to me an endless time, Dr Daly himself opened the dispensary door. He was so amazed at seeing me that he did not speak.

"Oh, doctor," said I, "come with me quickly! She is dying."

With an effort Dr Daly recovered his voice. "Miss Thursley from the Hall! Good Lord!" he exclaimed, "is it Mrs Sherbrook who is ill? Has she killed herself, and then sent for me?"

"No, no," said I; "it is my mother, and she is dying." I caught hold of Dr Daly's arm, "Come—I tell you to come! Don't mind Aunt Jane or the old woman you fought about. Doctor, if you will not come quickly, my mother may be dead!"

The kind old man drew me to a chair and made me sit down.

"My dear young lady," said he, "it is you who look almost dying, because you have run too fast. You must rest. Do not be alarmed, my dear young friend; I have no doubt a little proper treatment would set Mrs Thursley quite to rights. Doubtless your aunt, Mrs Sherbrook, has already undertaken the case? Eh?"

"She has."

"And failed! Just so—just so! Mrs Sherbrook is perhaps a little too confident in her own curative powers. Mrs Sherbrook is a theorist."

Dr Daly sat down opposite me and rubbed his hands with

an air of infinite satisfaction, as if there was no such thing as hurry in this world—as if death were an easy-going old gentleman, who took his time and killed men at his leisure.

“I doubt if Mrs Sherbrook will permit me to attend a patient in her house,” continued he. “May I ask, Miss Thursley” . . . and he rubbed his hands still more slowly . . . “may I ask, before I make up my mind to undertake the case, what is the nature of Mrs Thursley’s attack ?”

“Inflammation of the lungs,” I replied.

“Gently, gently, my dear young lady—gently ! Let us rather say a severe cold. I am aware Mrs Sherbrook invariably exaggerates the gravity of an attack, but perhaps more so when the liver is affected than the lungs : still, she exaggerates. We will not imagine the worst until we have used the stethoscope. The stethoscope will enlighten us. Till then let us say a severe cold.”

I seemed to have my poor mother’s face of pain before me. I remembered vividly her state and recovered strength.

“Doctor,” I cried, starting up, “call the illness by what name you will, I tell you it may be death which is coming to my mother, and may have come while you were sitting there rubbing your hands and making up your mind. Doctor, you madden me ! for you, at least, should believe in danger and dying if others cannot. I will go if you will not !” And so saying, I rushed through the open door into the street.

Dr Daly ran after me, calling out, “Wait, my dear young lady—wait ! I’ll harness the grey horse and bring him round in five minutes.”

I had waited long enough. “No, no !” I cried to him ; “overtake me if you will, I can wait no longer.” And I ran on, but kept looking back, hoping to see the doctor’s gig.

There was another delay at the avenue gate. Harriet had locked it after me ; it was she who opened it again. I suppose the rest of the family were sleeping hard like Snipkins.

“Harriet,” said I, “keep that gate open. The doctor’s gig will come through in a moment.”

Harriet screamed—“Dr Daly’s gig ! Oh, Miss Sophy, Mrs Thursley must be ha-dying !”

Dying ! It was the first time I had heard any voice but my own say that stabbing word. “Dying !” I repeated—“dying ! Harriet, who told you she was dying ? How dare you say that word to me ? How dare you, cruel, heartless girl ? Do you want to kill me ?” I know I turned from the poor girl in a fury, and ran as if I had fled from death itself and could outrun it.

At the turn of the avenue in sight of the house, I stopped and listened. I heard the sound of wheels and of a trotting horse. When I saw the old doctor's gig appear, a ray of hope entered my heart, like a ray of the sunshine around me ; and I thought, perhaps there is time—there may be no real danger yet.

Dr Daly saw me, and called out to me to stop ! stop ! and he would pick me up. Whipping on the horse, he overtook me and bade me climb into the seat beside him. The little man was very cheery. "Fine morning, Miss Thursley—fine morning !"

It is strange how doctors so often have that unnaturally cheerful manner. His liveliness jarred with my present mood, so I did not pay much attention to what he said. I only remember it struck me he was pleased at being called in suddenly to attend Aunt Jane's own sister at Sherbrook Hall.

We entered by the still open drawing-room window. The old horse could be trusted to stand alone. Dr Daly came into the drawing-room, speaking as if he were talking to the calico-covered chairs.

"Should have a fire here : very cold ! very cold !" He put his hand in his pocket. "Stethoscope—quite right. Blister, plaster—quite right. I always take such things about with me, in case, my dear young lady—in case they may be wanted." I led the way across the hall up-stairs.

"Mrs Sherbrook," continued the doctor, cheerily, "will not approve of the blister ; she will object to it. Mrs Sherbrook will most decidedly object ! But I will tell her, I will tell her plainly, as I have undertaken the case, I insist upon her leaving the treatment to me. I will say—Mrs Sherbrook, excuse me, excuse me, but I insist upon prescribing for this case as I think fit ! We differ, Mrs Sherbrook—we differ. We differ on all subjects. You never light a fire in August. I light one whenever I feel cold. I shall order a fire to be immediately lighted in the patient's room. We differ, Mrs Sherbrook—we differ."

"Hush !" said I to the garrulous old man—"hush ! and listen before we go in."

My mother's breathing had grown louder while I had been away. The sound was unlike any other I had ever heard before. "Listen, doctor—listen !" I watched him eagerly. His countenance fell. I did not know till that instant how much I had expected good news. I grasped the doctor's arm.

"There is hope ?" I said ; "she cannot die ? Have pity have pity, and tell me she cannot die ?"

From this moment Dr Daly was a changed man. He said, "While there is life there is hope." He paused, and added almost severely, "At a time like this, it is our duty to be calm." He shook off my grasp and opened the door.

My mother, hearing our voices outside, had raised herself in bed, and leant her arm upon the pillow. "You are come at last," she said, in a thick, hoarse voice—"at last! at last! It is good of you, doctor, to come; and good of her to bring you." My mother ever thought any little thing I did for her most kind.

"Sophy, come here! Sophy . . ."

But her voice failed her. She cast such a look of yearning love upon me, that my heart stood still, and I turned cold, and trembled in the great struggle to drive back the cowardly tears which choked me. The smothered sob stifled me; I could not speak. My mother put her arm round my neck, and leant her cheek against mine, while the doctor examined her. He said but little. Once when he told her to take a long breath, and that in doing so she cried out with pain and coughed, I heard him say, "Pleurisy—congestion," words which I did not then understand.

My mother spat blood, and was quite exhausted by the cough. For an instant I imagined she had stopped breathing. I held my breath, and fancied I did not feel her move upon my bosom. I thought she was dead. And then I felt her breathe again; and the joy of that moment bewildered me.

Some time may have gone by before the doctor's voice recalled me to my senses. I looked up and saw Aunt Jane standing beside me wrapped in her dressing-gown, and I heard the doctor say, "There is no time to lose!" These words awakened me, and gave me power to move and act.

Aunt Jane wanted to wrest the plaster Dr Daly had given me from my hand. The doctor interfered. He and my aunt had an altercation over the bed. My mother looked at me and actually smiled. "Poor Jane!" said she—"poor Jane!"

Dr Daly begged my aunt to leave the room, but she refused. While they were thus wrangling, the seven-o'clock bell happened to ring, so I put down the plaster and whispered to my aunt that she would be too late to read the *Commentary*. I thus prevailed upon her to go away and finish dressing.

I was rejoicing that she had gone, when I heard her come back again. However, it was merely to say, "Sophia, mark my words—you have an indigestion, and a chill on your liver, and your lungs and your heart are as well as mine. Plasters and

blisters are poisonous for you ; and if you take my advice, you will not mind Dr Daly, for he would bleed you if he dared ! ” She was gone before the doctor could reply.

The remedies soon gave relief. When Dr Daly was leaving, my mother told him she felt better. “ It is a mere cold, doctor,” she said. He only answered that he would return about two o’clock. “ And, Mrs Thursley, obey my orders, and not Mrs Sherbrook’s.”

The doctor asked me to take him to Aunt Jane, as he must speak to her before he left. I told him where her room was, but he whispered to me, “ Come yourself.” So I went with him, and was just entering my aunt’s room when I thought I heard my mother call, and ran back to her ; and then she delayed me to ask some question about the blister, and then the speaking made her cough, and that again delayed me.

Some ten minutes must have passed before I joined Dr Daly and Aunt Jane.

I opened the door unnoticed, and stood still on the threshold, for the words I heard echoed like a death-knell in my heart. It was as if I had caught the first sound of the passing bell. The doctor was saying, “ I tell you, Mrs Sherbrook, this has been neglected too long. There is great weakness of the heart, and I doubt if she can pull through. The system must be kept up, for there is not strength to rally. She may not last twelve hours. Why won’t you listen to me ? Why won’t you believe me, Mrs Sherbrook ? ” And the doctor brought down his hand upon the table with a bang which made Aunt Jane start. “ Twelve hours ! Do you hear ? Twelve ! What am I saying ? She may be dead in six ! Dead ! dead, Mrs Sherbrook ! and then what can you do for her ? ”

Dr Daly and my aunt were standing ; a small writing-table separated them. The doctor had lost his self-command, as if Aunt Jane had provoked him beyond bearing. My aunt was visibly agitated.

“ Dead ! ” repeated the doctor ; “ and when she is dead, you will believe she is dying, and ask me to cure her.”

“ I never will ask you for stimulants and violent remedies ! Never, Dr Daly—never ! for I don’t approve of them.”

Aunt Jane hesitated, as if she had lost her head ; and then, as if she spoke by rote, she said, “ Nature is the restorer of nature.”

“ Nature the restorer of nature ! ” retorted the doctor, with a sneer. “ Very fine—very fine indeed ! Nature should be what she won’t be ; and, Mrs Sherbrook, the dead should live again

and come back and forgive us when we have helped to kill them. They should do so, but they won't! It is we who will come back to our senses, and see and know, and live never to forgive ourselves. But the dead won't live because we say they ought to live!"

"The dead!" said I, walking forward—"the dead!"

My voice silenced the doctor, and startled both him and Aunt Jane.

"Sophy," exclaimed my aunt, "come here! I can argue no more. He takes away my breath. Tell him your mother has only an indigestion, and that she will soon be well again. Tell him she is not dying; tell him, Sophy, for I cannot. He won't hear me."

"Indigestion," muttered the doctor; "is she mad? Pleurisy, congestion of the lungs, aggravated heart-disease!"

"Doctor," said my aunt, resting on the table and looking him full in the face, "she is not in danger of her life."

"She is in danger, hourly danger, of her life," said the doctor.

"She is not! she is not!" cried my aunt, and, overcome with agitation, she burst into a wail of tears.

"Why won't you speak, Sophy?" she sobbed. "He is right! he is right! She is dying! I believe him, I believe him now! Speak to me, Sophy—speak!"

"Yes, Aunt Jane," said I; "believe him. Believe him, dear. It is best to believe the truth."

The old doctor was touched. His anger vanished, and he tried to soothe Aunt Jane. Her cry of sorrow would have moved any one. It moved me only too deeply. I felt for her; and yet I disliked her for crying. Her tears unnerved me.

"In the midst of life we are in death," said Dr Daly, solemnly. "We should be ready, Mrs Sherbrook, and bear up, and not give way. Be brave; it is your duty to go now to your sister and warn her of her danger."

"I cannot! It would kill me!" sobbed my aunt. "Poor Sophia! and she never cared for prayers! Send for Catherine! send for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart! She will tell Sophia; I know she will. The words would choke me! I could not speak—I could not! Poor Sophia! we never agreed; but you don't know, Dr Daly, how I loved her long ago, before Sophy grew up. Send for Catherine, and don't ask me to tell Sophia she is dying!"

"Catherine Stewart! that hard woman!" I exclaimed, with a cry of horror. "Never! never! I will go to my mother myself. I am her child; and as I love her, I will tell her she

is dying. I will have the heart to tell her! No stranger shall do this thing. No hard, unsympathetic woman. Doctor, I implore you, I implore you, keep that woman from this house! You see I do not shrink. I know that I can tell her. I have no feeling now."

"Go, Sophy—go!" cried out my aunt, wiping the tears from her eyes. "Let her go, doctor, for she will go if she likes. Sophy always will do what she likes. Sophy's feelings are not like mine. She was not even sorry, doctor, when her uncle went away yesterday and I was so lonely! Poor dear Edward! But Sophy does not feel like me; Catherine would feel more. Oh, Dr Daly, Sophy's mother is dying, and she does not even cry!"

My aunt burst into a fresh passion of tears: her grief shook my soul and took away my strength. I hated her; and then my heart smote me. "Comfort her, doctor," I said; "stay and comfort her." But Dr Daly told me he must take leave for the present, and go to a cottage ten miles off, at the other side of Harefield, to see a poor woman whose baby was born last night. "Born that it may die," said I, bitterly.

"I must go, Mrs Sherbrook," said the doctor; "and remember, you have promised me."

My aunt answered with a loud sob, "You know I disapprove of it, Dr Daly; but I will tell Snipkins."

Oh, had I but asked what it was they meant, instead of taking it for granted they alluded to fires and bandages and blisters!

The old doctor was very kind to me, and led me from Aunt Jane's room. I happened to fall, and he lifted me up tenderly, like a father. "My dear young friend," said he, "God bless you and give you strength!" There was a tear in his eye, so I turned away from him and left him brusquely.

The man condemned to death, will walk bravely till he puts his foot upon the first step of the scaffold, and then the heart of a strong man will faint because the time has come: there is no reprieve; the hour is no more coming—it has come.

My courage failed me, and I drew back my hand when it touched the door. I shrank like a coward from entering the sick-room. My heart beat so loud and high that I did not hear my mother breathe. Suddenly I remembered, and missed the sound which I had made the doctor stop and listen to. Coward that I am, thought I, have I waited till it is too late?

There is a courage which springs from desperate fear, and stills the panic of our soul, and gives us power to act. I walked quickly into the room, and stood beside the bed. I

found my mother breathed, and loudly. It was the agitation and beating of my own heart which had deafened me.

My mother opened her eyes and saw me. "The cough is not so hard," said she, in a strange hoarse voice; "I am better, Sophy, only feverish still." She clasped my hand in her hot one. Speaking brought on the cough, yet she whispered to me, "Dear child, I shall soon, very soon, be well," and she smiled.

I stood silent, like a murderer come to kill and shaken in his purpose. You might give, without a pang, a death-blow to the sleeping or insensible; but it is hard to stab the lively hopeful heart that does not think of death.

I smoothed back the white locks which had fallen on my mother's forehead; my hand lingered on her brow, for by my touch I felt that she was living, and death seemed farther away.

"I shall soon be well," my mother whispered; "who could be ill if that fine sky lasts?"

She looked towards the window, and my eyes followed hers. The morning mist had risen in long thin clouds, like angels' wings, from earth to heaven. I tried to master my trembling voice and speak: "This is indeed a lovely morning," I said, "to be born of such a wretched night. When first I went out, the ground was soaked with rain; but I saw the blue mists rising upwards; and see now, what beautiful clouds they have become! My love," I whispered, bending low over the bed, "are not these clouds risen from the dank earth, like our own souls when they will leave the sorrows of this life and take flight to heaven with angels' wings? My love, my only love and joy, don't think of the strong affection which binds us together with a chain like slaves, but look up at the sky and its soft clouds, and think how beautiful the angels will be in heaven."

I felt my poor mother's hand tremble violently. "Sophy, what do you mean? You cannot mean . . ." A fit of coughing interrupted her; she sank upon my arm. When her voice returned, she whispered, "What are the angels to me? I don't know them; I don't love them; but I love you, my child. Oh, my God! leave me, leave me! I cannot go." She pressed my hand with all the strength of fever. A burning tear, wrung from me by the sight of her anguish, fell from my eye upon her cheek, and I said the cruel words I had steeled my heart to say—"You are dying. The doctor says that you are dying."

For a moment she lay motionless. I thought she had

fainted ; and then her lips moved, and starting up, she cried in a hoarse and piercing tone, “ Pray for me, Sophy—pray ! ”

I felt I knew not how to pray, though I could say the Lord’s Prayer, and prayed every morning and evening in a sort of way. Till now religion had been a light matter with me. At times the Sherbrooks had even made it a ridiculous and tiresome piece of “ sound doctrine.” God was not a near reality to me, but rather a vague idea which my mind perceived but did not understand. A heavenly Father ? Yes ; that is a kinsman living far away whose power and glory I believed in, but whom I did not know. I was silent.

My mother cried out again, “ Pray for me, Sophy—pray ! ”

I fell upon my knees by the bedside, crying aloud that in this hour of agony I knew not how to pray : “ I can only cry to Thee for help, O God ! This dying woman craves for help to die, for I must stay behind, and she must die, and she cannot die alone ! Come near, and be with her. She cannot die alone ! Pass by, my God,” I prayed, “ and have pity, have pity, and behold what a passion of powerful, living feeling there is in this poor woman’s soul. No deadness there, no decay to dull the pang of separation ! She feels all the wrench and pain of parting, so assuage, assuage the agony of love she bears me, for the bitterness of death lies there ! O God ! still Thou the anguish of this living, unchanged soul wrenched from its earthly ties ! O Comforter ! O Saviour ! ” I cried, “ draw near in this hour of death ! The pain is too great to bear alone. My God ! my God ! she cannot, oh, she cannot die alone ! ”

CHAPTER XII.

When the first shock of parting was over, my mother grew much weaker. She fell into a long, deep sleep. I was glad in my ignorance, thinking sleep must be good for her.

Aunt Jane had recovered her tears and fright, and was most hopeful. She thought “ Sophia ” going on “ very nicely ; ” in fact, she seemed to consider her nearly well. She kept incessantly mumbling something about Dr Daly. “ He is always mistaken—always ! She never wanted it. I will tell him she slept all the time ; and I am sure he never thought she would sleep like this, for he is always mistaken ; and he killed that

poor old woman by giving stimulants ; and I told him he was killing her, and really . . ." &c., &c., &c., &c., &c., &c. I did not listen. Her running rivulet of whispering speech did not disturb my mother's sleep ; and so intently did I watch by the bedside, fearing terribly, yet almost hoping, that I forgot Aunt Jane's presence.

Dr Daly came again at two. His first words were, "Asleep ? Why have you let her sleep like that ? How long has this stupor lasted ? Has she got the brandy regularly every quarter of an hour, as I ordered ? Mrs Sherbrook," he said angrily, turning to Aunt Jane—"Mrs Sherbrook, have my orders been disobeyed ?"

"Dr Daly, you know I disapprove of stimulants, for they are poison to—"

"Mrs Sherbrook, you cannot have forgotten your promise ?"

"Indeed I did tell Snipkins to send for some brandy, and perhaps she has had to send to Vottingham, though I told her to send to the dispensary, as you said you had one bottle left ; for I am sure Edward has no brandy—and if he had, it would be in the inner cellar, and he has taken all his keys with him ; and as Edward has not come home, I should have to send to Vottingham for a man to pick the lock ; and even if he opened the outer cellar, no locksmith could open the inner one, because Edward says there is an iron bar and a peculiar sort of padlock, which no one understands but himself ; and even if it was open, I know there is no brandy there ; and George thinks Edward keeps his port-wine somewhere else ; but, you see, Edward never will tell me, because he knows I disapprove of alcohol in every form ; and indeed, Dr Daly, I think good, sound, healthy sleep is much better for Sophia than brandy."

The doctor did not answer Aunt Jane. He appeared not to hear her. He stood speechless by the bedside, and held my mother's hand, feeling her pulse. His usually ruddy face was livid with rage. Terror seized me.

"Doctor," I said, in a low voice, "if this brandy has not come, if you cannot awake her from this stupor, there is no hope ?"

"It must have come—it must !" he said, loudly.

"Oh why was I not told before ? Why was I not told instead of Snipkins ?"

I found Aunt Jane's maid in her mistress's room standing before the "mourning wardrobe." She held a black stuff-gown and a roll of crape in her hand. The silk dress Aunt Jane had got when the widow of her first cousin once removed had died,

lay stretched upon the sofa. I knew at a glance what the woman was doing, and I sickened with disgust. Snipkins smiled at me in an imbecile kind of way, unlike her usual stern self.

"Miss Sophy," said she, "I'm just ha-looking hover Mrs Sherbrook's black things. She'll want 'em hafore long. I'm ha-thinking she'll be for throwing away that 'ere black stuff; and there's 'Arriet ha-sitting hidle with 'er 'ands ha-doing nothing, and Satan ha-running loose in this 'ere world seeking whom he may devour! and hit disgusts me to see 'er! With this bit of hextra crape, you'll see hif hi won't make 'Arriet do hup that hold skirt deep and decent, and fit for my hown mourning when your poor dear mar dies. Look, Miss Sophy, the stuff his not that bad hafter hall."

I caught the dress which Snipkins offered me, and threw it on the floor and trampled it under foot.

"Hold your offending tongue, unnatural wretch!" I cried; "give me the brandy this instant—without another word! Do you hear?"

"Sperits! no, miss—no!" whimpered Snipkins; and then she exclaimed, with some of her usual impudence, "'Ow dare you come haccusing hof me? Mrs Sherbrook won't believe you, Miss Thursley! She knows, good lady, has 'ow you're ha-walking hon the broad road which leads to heverlasting perdition—heverlasting perdition," she repeated, and began to cry. "I might 'ave taken one glass of hale with that 'ere black gentleman, which I'm not haccustomed to."

I was struck dumb, for the idea crossed my mind that Snipkins was not quite sober. I had never seen a tipsy woman before. To be drunk at such an hour, and with death in the very house! I loathed the odious creature. I shrank from her, as from a reptile, with horror!

Snipkins wiped her eyes. "Not ha drop ho sperits would I touch," said she—"not ha drop! though Mrs Sherbrook her own self told me to send to the dispensary for a bottle hof brandy: 'Halthough,' said she, 'Snipkins, I hentirely disapprove of hit; and hi said, 'Hand so do hi, ma'm.'"

I asked breathlessly, "Did you send? Did you obey her orders?" My voice frightened Snipkins into a fresh apology.

"I never touches ha drop, Miss Sophia—never!"

"Did you or did you not obey Mrs Sherbrook's orders? Answer me—this moment!"

"Miss Sophia, hi'll complain you to your haunt. Hi gives my horders to 'Arriet, and not to you." And the degraded

being came close up to me and whispered confidentially, "P'raps 'Arriet 'as bin and taken 'alf a glass too much."

She made an effort to catch me by the arm ; but I shook off the hateful wretch, and ran from the room and along the passage. I looked back in terror, to see if Snipkins followed me. I saw her standing in the doorway of my aunt's room, holding up the black dress by the two sleeves and gibbering like a fool —like Death gone mad ; merrily, with imbecile joy, flaunting the weeds of woe.

Harriet declared her aunt had given her no message. I ran to the front door and found Dr Daly's gig, but no one in it. I searched for George ; he was not to be found. The servants said he had gone for his mid-day walk. Thomas was in Votlingham. Bill had never driven a horse in his life. At last a stable-boy was found, and started in the doctor's gig.

There was not even a bottle of sal-volatile in the house. When I came into the sick-room empty-handed, the old doctor could not contain his anger. He bitterly upbraided my aunt for not seeing the messenger herself, for trusting to the memory of her maid, and for allowing all these long hours of fatal delay.

My mother was sleeping heavily still.

"It is weakness of the heart," said the doctor, "which makes her sleep like that. She is sinking—sinking fast. I tell you, Mrs Sherbrook, as I told you before this day, it is you who will have killed your sister."

For the moment Aunt Jane was cowed. She did not speak ; she put up her hands, as if she pleaded for mercy. The doctor stood in front of her, and said in a clear, hard voice, which seemed to echo in the stillness of the room—

"You have lost the only hope. It is even now too late."

A man who in a distant prison-cell hears the murdering rabble come nearer and nearer, entering each cell and slaughtering as they come, and yet thinks there is a door which, could he but unlock, would let him out into the free world ; and thinks, too, there is a friend who hears him call and knock, and is coming to his rescue, but slowly, as if there were time enough,—a man in such a strait as this has lived an age in sixty seconds ! There is a lifetime in a minute ! Look at your watch, and the hands will not seem to move.

The doctor paced up and down the sick-room, counting each minute, each second in each minute ! I knelt beside the bed and held my mother's hand, watching for fear her pulse might

stop. Every now and then I started, thinking I heard a sound, and that an hour had wellnigh passed away. I would ask the doctor how long we had waited, and find five minutes had scarce gone by.

My mother still slept on—or rather, she lay in a dreamy, half-conscious state, coughing feebly from time to time. We tried in vain to wake her up: she sighed, and made a sign as if the sunlight blinded her, then drowsily sank her head upon my breast.

Dr Daly paced the room once more. I listened to every sound, but time would not pass away. My heart sank within me. I thought every breath my mother took would be her last.

The doctor stopped his walk, and stood still beside the bed. He pulled back the curtains he had closed. A change came over my mother's face. I saw it come, and a bitter cry escaped my lips—the cry of hope gone by for ever!

It may have been soon or it may have been long afterwards that I heard, that we all heard, the sound of approaching wheels. "Too late," repeated the doctor; "of no use now."

Dr Daly dropped the stimulant down my mother's throat. She could hardly swallow, but revived a little, opened her eyes, touched the glass, and feebly said "Jane" to my aunt.

"It was Dr Daly who sent for it," exclaimed Aunt Jane, as if she were excusing herself for having brandy in the house—strange woman that she is!

"Sophy," murmured my mother, "come soon . . . soon," and she seemed to faint away. The doctor tried to renew the dose. She could not swallow. He tried again, and then again, and then again; but all in vain. The faint continued. We raised her in bed—we chafed her hands; but it was a sleep from which we could not awaken her.

"She is dead," said the doctor—"she is dead!"

CHAPTER XIII.

When entranced by the power of a nightmare, sobs and piercing cries of woe may strike our ear, and we will feel that we cannot move to give help or comfort. When we awake, can we say if we were dreaming, or if in truth we heard the cry of living sorrow?

When my mother's last breath had fled, I think I heard a piercing cry, and saw my aunt throw herself upon the bed, and heard her call out loudly, "Sophia, speak to me! speak to me! You are not dead!" And then it seems to me some of the servants—I cannot say which of them—came into the room, and that Aunt Jane was carried out by Dr Daly and quite a crowd of people. Can I say now if this were so, or if I dreamed?

Unless I dreamt it all, I think I was left alone, still seated on the bed, with my arm around my mother still supporting her, and with her head still resting on my breast. Did I think she was sleeping, or did I know she lay dead?

It seems to me I thought she breathed, and that I saw her move, and laid her down upon the pillow, and took the glass which the doctor had left lying on the bed and held it to her lips, and thought she breathed upon it, and then . . . that I looked again, and knew it was my own breath which dulled the glass. I dreamt (it must have been a dream, or I could not now be living)—I dreamt that I felt the agony of conceived joy turned into dead despair, and that I sank upon my knees benumbed, without a prayer and without a hope left in my soul.

Hours may have passed, or only slowly dying minutes, when I raised my head and thought Uncle Sherbrook stood beside me—not a hard, not a forbidding, but a softened man. I thought he spoke in a kind, sad voice—in a voice I had never heard before—and that he lifted me up, and supported me with his strong arm; and I thought that I leant my head on his shoulder, and felt glad in my weakness I had found strength to rest upon. "It is not good for you to be here," I heard him say. I thought he bore me tenderly, and took me away from the chamber of death, and led me into another room, but not into Aunt Jane's. All this time I cannot tell if I lay dreaming with open eyes, or if I closed them when night came on, and slept till the sun had risen some hours next day.

But I do remember clearly, vividly, the first return to conscious sorrow—the gathering together of my senses, like the cloud of madness gathering in my brain. Madness? In madness there is an hour of sorrow, then one of joy: it is a half-conscious, half-believing state; but this was worse. I awoke, I shook off the stupor of a dream, and I believed, with all the strength and power of life—I believed that what I loved most on earth lay dead. Dead! Oh what an awful word is that when we believe in its reality! Dead! silent, cold, and deaf! If the dead could only come back to us for one short hour, that

we might know they had heard our first most bitter cry of sorrow, and that their love and pity had not turned to indifference! It rends our heart when the love of the living turns suddenly cold towards us; but we have a hope, and think in time it will grow warm again—or else we scorn it from us with anger, and our passion turns it into hatred, and hatred is a warm and living thing! It stirs us up to fight with it, to repay its hate with hate; but it does not chill, and paralyse, and make impotent slaves of us like cold indifference. Our anger cannot fight against the apathy of death. Our passions rise in vain. It is this sense of utter weakness which subdues us, and makes obedient children of us in our sorrow. Awe-struck and hopeless, we become calm—conquered by the silent apathy of death.

I arose from the bed on which I found myself lying. I realised where I was, and knew that my mother lay dead in the house. I felt a longing to see her face once more. I yearned to see those features I loved so well, for it seemed a lifetime since I had beheld them. I tried to recall that face and look to my mind, and I found with dismay that I could not. My memory was blurred.

I went out into the silent passage,—it was silent as the grave. But I could not enter the room of the dead, for the door was locked; so I turned back and crossed the lobby, and went into my aunt's room.

Aunt Jane lay half dressed upon the sofa. She screamed when she saw me, and Snipkins screamed too. I said—

“Have you the key of my mother's room? I must go in there and see her.”

“She thinks her poor dear mother is alive!” screamed my aunt. “Sophy, Sophy, she is dead! Don't you know she is dead? I see you don't believe it, or you would not wear a blue band round your waist, though you have queer ideas of mourning. Poor dear Sophia, she is dead! and I know Dr Daly thinks I killed her, and you will never forgive me, Sophy!”

With a great effort I remembered clearly the events of yesterday. I had taken my aunt's hand, but I let it fall and recoiled from its touch. She murdered my mother with her silly whims and follies, thought I. Aunt Jane saw that I held back, and she burst into a bitter cry, and sobbed like a child. Her grief touched me. Subdued and hopeless, I had lost the power to hate. My aunt's sorrow moved me to pity, and taking her outstretched hand, I said—

“It is too late; she is dead, and cannot come back to me now. I forgive you. It is too late!”

Aunt Jane clasped me in her arms, and sobbed over me, and blessed me. I asked a second time for the key of my mother's room.

"Why do you lock the door?" said I, "when you know I must wish to go in and gaze upon her face, for fear I should forget her."

"Forget your own poor mother!" exclaimed my aunt, starting away from me in horror; "unnatural child! you do not feel like me! I never shall forget poor dear Sophia!"

"I cannot see her now," I said, half closing my eyes, and speaking aloud to myself. "I have forgotten her—forgotten her before the first full day of death is past!"

"Forgotten her! Oh, Sophy, you have no feeling!" And Aunt Jane gave way to an outburst of tears, mingled with exclamations of astonishment and horror and sorrow.

"Yes," I repeated; "I have forgotten her."

A sudden dread took hold of me. What did I know of death? A change might have come over the features I loved; they might be strange to me, and not recall the face I longed to see again.

"I can wait no more, for time is passing," I cried, in an agony of impatience. "Unlock that door, or I will break it open. I must see her once again."

Snipkins uttered a loud scream. "Lor, miss!" she cried, "you should not go ha-gazing hon the corpse!"

Corpse! I clung to a chair for support. My heart fainted within me at the loathsome word, which seemed to turn the living one of yesterday into the hideous carrion of to-day—into corruption with a name apart! Corpse! inhuman word!—as if one short night were long enough to kill my deep affection, and make me shun what I most loved!

Uncle Sherbrook came in from the dressing-room and asked who had screamed.

"It was poor Snipkins, Edward," sobbed my aunt; "she is quite upset by hearing Sophy say she must have the key, and will go in to poor dear Sophia's room. Snipkins is shocked, for Sophy says she has forgotten her poor mother. She says dreadful things, and does not cry. Oh, Edward, Sophy is most unfeeling!"

"Hush, Jane!" replied my uncle, severely.

"Sophy," he said to me gently, putting his arm round me and supporting me as he had done yesterday, "you wish to see the dead once more. When my own father died I had that same desire. Your mother is dead—I know you have

not forgotten it; but come with me and see, and you will believe."

As we left the room, I remember hearing Snipkins loudly exclaim, "The master's not 'imself like!"

They had laid my poor mother low on the bed, straightly and stiffly; her hands were crossed upon her breast. When first I saw the stiff, dead body, my blood ran cold; but when I came near, I stood enraptured, filled with a kind of awful joy. There was a look of heaven in that still, pale face—a strange, unearthly look, as if the veiled eyes had seen the living God, and could not gaze again on earthly sights. There was a holy smile upon the parted lips, and peace, unutterable peace, upon the brow; no look of pain—no weird, distorting frown.

I gazed and gazed until that look was engraved upon my heart for ever. I bent and kissed the cold, dead lips—the speechless lips! And then I took a long, a last long look, and turned away. "Come; it is over," I said. "She is silent,—she is dead. I have seen her face, and now I know her spirit is with God."

Uncle Sherbrook walked hastily from the darkened room of death. It was I who locked the door, for he forgot to do so. I gave him the key and went into the room where I had lain the night before. My uncle followed me a few paces, and then stopped. I looked at him, and saw his face quivered. I thought he was going to speak to me, but he went away and left me alone.

I found the blinds pulled down and the curtains drawn. The darkness oppressed me; so I let in the sunlight, and opened the window that I might breathe the air and look out upon the clouds and trees. I heard a bird singing as it rose skywards—a song of joyful rapture. A holy calm came over me—a feeling of peace.

CHAPTER XIV.

The morning of the funeral came at last. They tell me my mother was buried the day week after she died. I had lost all knowledge of time; each hour in that long week had seemed a day. I could not sleep. When the sun rose, I felt in a dull sort of way the dreaded day had come. When our spirit has been wrench'd by too much sorrow, our power of feeling dies.

During those long morning-hours, I remember nothing but a sense of endless weariness, until a sound of muffled voices awakened in my mind an idea of what was passing near me. I got up from the sofa on which I had thrown myself, without undressing, the night before. I started, for I thought a woman in deep mourning stood by the window ; and then I perceived it was my own reflection in the long glass—the reflection of a ghost in awful black. I looked down at my dress, and saw that I was clothed in the deepest mourning. Strange to say, I felt no surprise. I am dressed for the funeral, thought I ; they are moving the coffin—that is the noise I hear.

I heard the shuffling of feet in the passage, and then the dull thud of something striking against the door. It is the coffin, I thought ; they are taking it away. I must follow it to the grave.

I opened the door, and saw they were carrying the pall-covered coffin across the lobby. Four men in black, with black scarves and weepers, and with huge black fan-topped staves in their hands, stood at the head of the staircase. I shuddered, for they were hideous to behold. I went out and followed the coffin slowly down-stairs. The hall was full of people. I do not know who they all were. I have a kind of notion that some one spoke to me, and that I looked at him, and did not know him ; that he spoke to me again, and that I thought he was my cousin, and said to him, "Denis, she is dead. You are too late."

But I do recall to mind that Uncle Sherbrook came up to me and drew me inside the drawing-room, and shut the door, and said sternly, "Sophy, you have no bonnet, and your hair is lying loose. You must not go to the funeral. You have gone through too much already." I remember these words, because I can never forget the great effort it was to me to grasp their meaning. My uncle bade me stay where I was. I obeyed him like a child.

I saw the black be-plumed hearse and the troop of hired mourners move slowly down the avenue, followed by a train of carriages. The hideous hearse went farther and farther from me, and I gazed at it unmoved, forgetting what it was I looked upon. Suddenly I seemed to understand it all. "They have taken her away from me !" I cried ; "for ever !—for ever !"

I remember nothing more that day.

Next morning (I suppose it was next morning) the ringing of a bell aroused me from a wearisome dream—a dream which left no impression on the mind—a play without a plot. The bell

sounded in my ear like a voice calling on me to awake and come back to the uneventful life, without great joy and without sorrow, which I seemed to have forgotten. The bell startled me, and I noticed for the first time that no bells were rung while my mother lay dead in the house.

When the prayer-bell rang, I went down-stairs and listened to the servants reading a genealogy from the Old Testament, and to Aunt Jane's hymn, and to the Commentary. I longed for comfort, but there was none in this cold worship of what almost seemed to me an unreal God. I listened unmoved, till Uncle Sherbrook, having given the final blessing, rose while we were still kneeling, and said, “‘I am the resurrection and the life,’ saith the Lord: ‘he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in me, shall never die.’ In great affliction . . .” began my uncle. His voice faltered. “‘You may go!’” he said to the staring servants. They were too much astonished to obey. “‘Go! Do you hear? You may go!’” cried my uncle, seemingly in a passion.

“Oh, Edward! you have frightened poor Snipkins!” exclaimed Aunt Jane, when the servants left the room. She made matters worse by wondering what could make Edward so violent, “when we are all so nervous!” and she shed tears. My aunt did not perceive Uncle Sherbrook was not angry, only overcome by sudden feeling. His emotion scandalised her, but it touched me: it moved me so that the sight of the empty place at table, now that we had all met again, made my heart die within me and dazed my mind. I repeated half aloud, “Though she were dead, yet shall she live. Live?—though she were dead? Who said those words?” I asked, distraught.

Aunt Jane gave a scream of horror. “Wicked girl! She does not know her Bible!” And then such a torrent of disconnected complaints and puzzling sentences poured forth, that I was bewildered, and felt I must escape or lose my mind. I opened the window and went out, and took the path I had trodden that last time, with my dear mother leaning on my arm.

Aunt Jane was going to follow me, but I heard Uncle Sherbrook call her back.

At first the cool air revived me, and I thought I would walk through the glen, and on, on, ever so far, out of sight of the dismal house, away from the sound of bewildering voices—beyond passion and sorrow, into solitude and peace. My strength failed me. I was forced to stop and rest in the beech-tree by the garden-gate. I leant back amongst the branches, for I was faint. The spot recalled past memories too vividly. I saw my

mother's pale face, I heard her cough, and I could not persuade myself that I did not really see her there resting by my side.

I was awakened from the sort of trance into which I had fallen by a footstep on the gravelled path. I looked up. It was Uncle Sherbrook, who walked hurriedly towards me. I sprang to my feet, and would have run away if I could, but I was too weak. I felt some of my old dread of him again. I shrank from him; "for he is excited," I thought, "and angry with me for leaving the breakfast-table. I have lost my nerve. A harsh word will kill me."

Uncle Sherbrook stood beside me. He broke a small branch from the beech-tree, saying, as if much annoyed, "They do not thin those lower branches as they ought;" and he went some little distance off and threw the bough among the bushes. He came back.

"Sophy," he said sternly, almost in an angry voice, "you must not grieve like this any longer. Do you hear?"

I gave no answer.

"Do you hear me, Sophy?" he repeated, still more loudly; and then, to my surprise, he bent down and kissed my forehead. He had never kissed me in his life before.

"Sophy," he said, and his voice actually trembled,—"Sophy, I have no child but you, so I will be your father now, and you shall be my child. God bless you!" He left me abruptly, for his voice had failed him.

Stupefied, I looked after him, and did not speak. "I will be your father now." The kind words rang in my ear: they were too much for me, like sudden sunshine blinding a prisoner in his darkness.

Kindness and sympathy may be set in some harsh key; yet they are a sort of music like none other, for they melt the hardened heart. Mine was a hard heart, and the tears that were wrung from it were bitter, like the waters which of old flowed from the rock.

I wept the gladness of my youth away.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER XV.

"It is nearly three months since her death, and there is Sophy——" began Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart.

"It was three months yesterday," remarked my aunt, "for Snipkins said so."

"Then it is more than three months since her death, and there is Sophy still giving way in that selfish manner. She could be quite cheerful if she would only make the effort. We all know, Mrs Sherbrook, that young people do not feel as we do."

"No, indeed, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane. "I did not allow a bell to be rung that first week, and I never ceased crying; while Sophy did not shed a tear until after the funeral. And, Catherine,—would you believe it?—Sophy never once thought about her mourning; and Snipkins and I had to take away her coloured dress without her knowing it, and we put a black one in its place—or else, Catherine, I really do think Sophy would still be wearing a blue band round her waist."

"Ah, Mrs Sherbrook," said the best of women, "we know what real feeling is; and yet we rejoice in the Lord." And she repeated a verse from some hymn.

"Do you hear that, Sophy?" asked Aunt Jane, much edified.

I replied that I heard everything Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart said, even when she was tatting.

"The true Christian," continued the admirable Catherine, "is she who rejoices in bereavement, and to whom chastisement is a delight. When my poor dear husband died, I rejoiced in the Lord!"

I was not surprised to hear Mrs Stewart was glad when the lunatic died. She is not the sort of woman who would care for a husband, either sane or insane

"A happy release! a happy release! Death is ever a happy release!" cried the admirable Catherine, cheerfully. "That is the right way to look at it. When my little girl died, I said, 'A happy release, O Lord!' Sophy should look upon her mother's release as a blessing from the Lord. What years of suffering upon earth she may have escaped! Why, Mrs Thursley might have been an invalid, spitting blood, for the next twenty years, going about from one health-resort to another, and dragging Sophy after her—a miserable existence, and very expensive! Really I have no patience with you, Sophy. You would depress any one."

In what a nice pleasant fashion some excellent persons can speak of the great sorrows of life! As if a heartrending grief were like an attack of the measles,—a commonplace distemper, disagreeable for your friends, but easy enough to recover from. How comfortless do the "happy release" kind of cheerful stock phrases sound in the ears of those who grieve with all their heart, and do not rejoice! The hard voice talked on in this "happy release" style, while the cheerful lady tatted with a lively energy that was distracting. She dropped two of her little round rings of tatting, and called me to pick them up. I could not find them on the floor, so I had to look in the tatting-bag, and to take out the collecting-cards and tracts.

"One by one; don't crumple them, Sophy."

I found the tatted rings in the pages of a tract called "Dainty Dishes for Damned Digestions." I was putting the tracts back into the tatting-bag, when my aunt cried out—

"Stop, Sophy; you have got Mr Boggle's 'Sinner' in your hand."

"Mr Boggle's what?" said I.

"His 'Dear Sinner, are you Saved?'" said my aunt. "Sophy, is it possible you never read the tracts Mr Boggle sent you in the first hour of your affliction? Oh, why does your froward heart turn from the means of salvation placed upon its path?"

Shortly after my mother's death, I had received a bundle of tracts from Mr Boggle, accompanied by a letter of condolence. The tracts, Mr Boggle said, were of his own composition, and had proved a blessing and a balm to the aching soul of many a burdened sinner. The attorney ended the letter with a prayer for my eternal salvation. I tossed the tracts into the fire, and threw in the letter on the top of them. I considered Mr Boggle took a great liberty in writing to me at all, and I did not think his prayers worth six-and-eightpence. Even if I got them for nothing (this was unlikely!), I felt I would rather not have

them. I had not seen Mr Boggle half-a-dozen times in my life, but there was no one I disliked more cordially,—not even the admirable Catherine. I could not endure his clerical appearance, bland manner, and benevolent white hair. To my eyes he was the very picture of a hypocrite. That Boggle would like to have the management of my affairs, thought I. He may pray for it, but he won't get it.

Aunt Jane said she would read us aloud the "Dear Sinner, are you Saved?" "I know, Catherine, *you* will listen to me with pleasure."

"Indeed I will, my dear Mrs Sherbrook," answered the best of women; "when you read, I can always tell where the improving bit of the sentence lies. You do not mix up the sound with the unsound, the chaff with the wheat, the light with the darkness."

My aunt's upper lip relaxed into a smile; but she drew it down again before she began to read, so that it might be all ready to give powerful emphasis to the sound doctrine. She hammered the following words into our heads: "'Dear sinner, are you saved? Dear sinner, have you experienced the fulness of the Gospel truth? Dear sinner, have you a conviction of SIN? Again I ask, dear sinner—dear, dear sinner—are you saved?'"

"Those are good sound home-thrusts for the sinner's conscience," remarked Mrs Stewart.

My aunt gave a pious sigh: she shook her curls, and asked me what I thought of those searching questions.

I particularly disliked the unctuous language of the tract. "I think," said I, "that Mr Boggle is very fond of sinners; and I am not astonished, for dear dishonest sinners suit some attorneys better than honest men and women."

My aunt turned up her eyes to heaven. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart rather surprised me by her silence. Her piercing black eyes searched mine, as if for a meaning my lips had not expressed, and then they were cast upon the tatting without a word.

When my aunt, having given two powerful sighs, looked down again from the ceiling, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was busy counting her stitches, and her thoughts appeared to be absorbed in the steeple. "I see, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane, "that you did not hear what Sophy said,—and so much the better. The Lord forgive her, and save her against her will, and make the good seed I am now sowing to bring forth fruit in her heart unawares! Amen," said my aunt to her own prayer.

The admirable Catherine merely chuckled her shuttle.

My aunt took up the tract again. "Where was I? Oh, I know. 'Dear, dear sinner, are you saved? NO, you are NOT! Come to your sweet Saviour—come—,'"

I can write no more. To me this pious twaddle is blasphemous. My pen refuses to blaspheme by transcribing these terms of maunding endearment addressed to the Son of God.

My aunt read on to the end. The tract finished up with a hope that the Dear Sinner might have as blessed experiences of the Fulness of the Gospel Truths as the writer had had during the years he had been employed as a means, under Providence, for the Conversion of Sinners from the error of their ways. Aunt Jane gave due effect to all the capital letters.

The afternoon had become too dark for us to see without candles. We were still in November, and George Snipkins did not bring in the lights before tea-time until the first day of December.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart laid down her tatting. She and my aunt began talking of their own "experiences of the fulness of Gospel truths." Mrs Stewart was eloquent on the subject of her "experiences." In her able hands this religious exercise became a marvellous piece of self-glorification. An experience of the fulness of a Gospel truth sounds as if it meant nothing; but it really meant a great many things, and above all, it meant that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart knew by experience she was an admirable woman, and an accepted saint, though she might call herself a miserable sinner.

I sat silent, leaning back in my chair like an old woman. Sorrow soon robs one of talking energy, and passion. My youth seemed passed away. The peculiar language no longer moved me to laughter, or to speak out with indignation. I was content to remain a passive hearer of pious twaddle. But though my dislike to Scriptural cant had become self-contained and silent, it lay deeper in my heart than of old. It had been a dislike—it was now a hatred.

When tears had melted my dull, painless grief into a soft, a sensitive, and nerveless sorrow, I felt what a wretched weak creature I was; how lonely in this uncongenial household; how unable to find strength and comfort in myself. She is dead; and I live, and am alone. There is no satisfaction in life, thought I. My hungry soul craved for love and sympathy to satisfy it. There was no satisfaction in a queer affection devoid of sympathy, like Aunt Jane's. There was more, yet not enough, in Uncle Sherbrook's reserved and almost speechless kindness.

I did not care to live, and so I longed to die. But what did I know of the life beyond the grave? What did I know of God? When my mother had asked me to pray for her, I had felt I was a stranger to God; my prayer was cold and uninspired. I knew I had been but a poor comforter to her soul in

the hour of its agony. Yes, indeed ; what did I know of God and death ? I knew in my heart that I did not really love God. I knew what love was, so I could not deceive myself. I felt I did not love God as I loved her who now lay dead. When I thought of these things, my spirit sank within me. It was then that I overcame my prejudice against the Bible, and began to read it on the sly, when I managed to escape to the path over the hill. I could read it nowhere else in peace. I should have died sooner than let Aunt Jane know I ever read the Bible to myself. Could the Ethiopian have changed his skin, he would have gone through tortures had he been at all a shy man. I was accustomed to be considered black at Sherbrook Hall ; and if I had turned white, I should have made a sensation in this well-regulated household. I should not mind making a sensation in the world, but a sensation in a narrow family circle is a misery I shrink from ! To be hermetically sealed with two or three little-minded people, who look at you, wonder at you, and make an event of you—oh, what unceasing worry ! I could imagine the horror of being “ rejoiced over in the Lord ” by Aunt Jane. “ She was lost, and now is found ! ” I could fancy my conversion to the Gospel truth being “ proclaimed upon the house-top ” a dozen times a-day to Snipkins, to the admirable Catherine, and even to Saint Boggle the attorney. I knew my aunt to be incapable of understanding that in every heart there is a holy place which it is sacrilege to unveil. I could hear her say, “ The dear sinner is saved ! she has been mercifully led to her salvation ! The seed has brought forth fruit ! Come, Sophy—come and tell us how you rejoice the Lord took your poor dear mother to Himself, and thus led you by the narrow path to the waters of life. Tell Catherine your blessed experiences of the fulness of the Gospel truth.” Would the rack be worse than this ?

Aunt Jane’s ludicrous Scriptural language had nearly made a heathen of me. I had conceived a prejudice against the Bible. Why should I lie, and pretend I had not ? Words in season, bread cast upon the waters, good seed on bad ground, narrow paths to everlasting salvation, lost sheep, were expressions which made me smile, because I had heard them in my youth so comically misapplied. Even the word “ Christian ” was associated in my mind with Aunt Jane’s “ truly Christian gentlemen ” and their liver complaints.

But now, when I came to read the Bible myself, without the Snipkins family, Tummus, or the forward young woman, without Dr MacShaw’s tedious twaddle, and above all, without Aunt Jane’s “ words in season,” I perceived it is a divine book, an inspired

comforter in sorrow. I cannot understand how any one who really likes the Bible can also like twaddle. The life of Christ is written with a simplicity devoid of sickly sentimentality.

If, from some uncouth parody, we have taken a dislike to the metaphors and metre of a poet, and then read the poem, and entering into the spirit of it, see how beautiful are the thoughts and language, we loathe the parody, for it made us unjust towards genius, and insensible to divine beauty. When I entered into the spirit of the Bible, my laughter was changed into remorse and shame, my prejudice into love. And then it was I loathed that language which is a Scriptural burlesque—a ludicrous parody of what is not ludicrous, but poetical and divine.

Therefore, whenever the best of women and Aunt Jane began to talk of their “experiences of the fulness of Gospel truths,” I turned away my thoughts in disgust, and tried not to listen; but you were sure to hear more than you cared for when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart’s voice was in the room. I had become a phlegmatic coward, or I should have got up and gone away. I used not to mind if I offended Aunt Jane, but I now nervously avoided making a fuss. Any little thing I did or said was a topic of conversation for a week. The best of women did not easily let a matter drop; and Aunt Jane could talk upon one subject for ever. And yet, though my aunt’s garrulity addled my brain, I preferred it to her silence. She had grown huffy with me of late; I think Snipkins made mischief between us. If I displeased Aunt Jane ever so little, she sighed and groaned, and would not speak; and still you could see it was pain and mortification to her to hold her tongue. I would hand her the ‘Record,’ or hope she did not feel ill, thinking to unlock her lips, and she would look like a martyr, and keep silence. But if I took no notice of her, she shed tears; and then I felt I was a monster, even when I did not exactly know how I had offended her.

So I sat on in patient silence, gazing out of the window into the twilight. The leafless horse-chestnut, and the dead trim lawn, looked to me like two lone souls dwelling together without sympathy. The leaves which the tree had shed upon the grass were not allowed to rest there. They had been brushed away, as an unfeeling heart would brush aside the tears and cares of others. Oh, what a cheerless view it was! I thought it looked, in the fading twilight, like the land beyond the grave before the dead had risen—while they still lay cold and silent. While the dead lay cold and silent; and I mused on this idea, until I seemed to see the dead of one whole generation lie before me in the twilight, with their hands crossed upon their breast. What a sight was this! And yet, thought I, this

is what really happens: generations die, and not one man or woman only; but we shut our eyes and will not see.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's voice in my very ear made me start up with a scream. She had changed her chair to one nearer mine.

"Sophy you are most ridiculous!" cried she; "wool-gathering in the moon! I don't believe you listen to a word that is said."

The admirable Catherine liked to have an attentive audience when she spoke of her experiences.

"There you are now, Sophy, looking towards the door," said she. "Yes, indeed; I understand. You mean to run away." And so I did. "But you will just sit down again, if you please, and learn good manners, and wait till James Sherbrook comes, and pour out the tea."

I did not know any one was expected; but when I heard this, I sat down without another word. I liked the Reverend James, and I wanted to know how his sick child was this day.

The Rector had often come to see us of late. I was glad when he came, for he was a kind-hearted and a sympathetic man. He had the tact of a nice nature, and seemed to know by instinct if you disliked your inmost thoughts to be dragged forwards under the curious eyes of near relations and admirable women. In my childhood, when I first knew him, he had gained my affections by refusing to catechise me publicly in the drawing-room. And the Reverend James was not a man who could refuse easily; for it was his nature to agree with everybody. This peculiarity made him the most loved but best abused man in the whole country-side. Over-amiability is a failing the world is hard upon, and judges more severely than a crime. Every one sat in judgment upon the Rector. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart used to snub him unmercifully. Had I been he, I should have snubbed her! But I had never yet known him do so; he bore with true charity the admirable Catherine's taunts and her offensive airs of superior "sound doctrine."

The Rector arrived with the candles. Thank heaven! he and the tea put an end (for the time being) to the edifying experiences. The tatting began again, and the tatting-bag was removed to the tea-table.

The good-hearted clergyman looked radiant with joy; he said his child had been pronounced out of danger. Aunt Jane was glad to hear this, and congratulated "James" most cordially. Mrs Stewart did not utter a word. She assumed an air of superior wisdom and contempt, which had the effect of immediately cooling my aunt's warmth of manner. This sudden

change surprised me, although of late I had often been struck by the singular power my aunt's excellent, indefatigable friend had over her. Aunt Jane followed where the best of women led.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart took no pains to conceal that she thought a poor clergyman with several children ought to be treated like the fool he was, if he went into ecstasies because an eighth baby intended to live and become noisy and hungry, and excessively troublesome and expensive besides. She would have damped the father's joy if she could; but she could not.

Joy was an infectious emotion to me in those sad days. I felt as if the Rector's happy voice brought me to life.

"Daly says there is every hope of our child's perfect recovery," said Mr Sherbrook; "and yesterday we thought him dying."

"Dying! How dreadful!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, carried away by sympathy, in spite of the admirable Catherine's indifference.

"Mary is overjoyed," said the Rector.

"Oh!" cried I, suddenly, "what rapture there must be in hope!"

The tatter's voice called out to me, "Really, Sophy, when you do speak you talk nonsense! Rapture! Stuff! and all about an infant! Where do you pick up such ridiculous words? Come here and pour out the tea, and ring for the muffins. I am quite hungry, I declare! Now, James," said she, vigorously tatting the steeple as she spoke—"now, James, we are all very glad the child is better; but if you wish to keep it in health, just tell your wife to have one grain of sense in the way she manages it."

"I think poor Mary tries to do her best," said the Rector, meekly.

"Then let her try and take the child out herself, and give it its proper air and exercise. I am sure a clergyman's wife who has no money to squander on servants, ought not to be ashamed of carrying her own baby through the village, especially when she has relations living there who are not accustomed to much style."

Mrs James Sherbrook is by no means well connected. Old Jack Jones, the yeoman farmer, is her grandfather. So this was a cruel hit; you could see, the rude insulting words cut deeply. Mr Sherbrook's countenance changed, but he kept his temper, and answered—

"Mary and I are no longer ashamed of anything, Mrs Stewart. Our foolish youth is past. We are growing old, and we know that life is a struggle."

There was something pathetic in the poor clergyman's voice and look as he said these words. I noticed, when his face was grave, what an anxious expression he had—a look of poverty, in keeping with his well-worn coat. The cares of life draw certain lines around the mouth and eyes. When we see them, we know what they mean. It grieves one to see them. And I could remember some years ago, in my early girlhood, what a handsome, fashionable-looking man the Rector was! I had got into a scrape once for telling Mary that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart called her husband "our clerical dandy."

The Rector was tall and thin, like all the Sherbrooks and all their family portraits; and yet, though he and my uncle were of the same type, with the same long thin nose and narrow forehead, they were very much unlike. It was the expression of the two faces which was so different. The one man looked important, reserved, severe; and the other modest and genial. My uncle's was a compressed, determined mouth; while the Rector had a good-tempered, and I fear I ought to say, a weak one. At the time I am speaking of, the Reverend James's dark hair and eyebrows made his pale face interesting; while my uncle's grey hair gave his dark skin the sallow hue of a truly Christian gentleman with the jaundice. But it was in their eyes these two men differed most. I lived for years in the same house with Uncle Sherbrook, and yet I cannot now tell of what colour were his eyes: they were hidden by an overhanging eyebrow; there was nothing of them. The Rector has large, soft, dark eyes, more like a woman's than a man's. You notice them. Gentlemen are apt to speak of them contemptuously, while ladies always admire them and say, "Mr James Sherbrook is a nice man; he has such good eyes!" To this day Mary Sherbrook is in love with her husband's eyes. She tells me in confidence they are "most aristocratic;" and she spoils the four children who have eyes like their father's, more than she does the others who have not. Those who know her will think this quite natural. Mary and her husband are not considered to have any common-sense whatever—they do not even get credit for the little they have.

Mr James Sherbrook was "caught," while still at college, by Mary's intriguing mother. He married young, partly from weakness and affection, and partly from a high sense of honour, a pretty, penniless girl, not quite a lady. Whereupon his father stopped his bachelor's allowance of £900 a-year, and disinherited him in favour of a younger son. Uncle Sherbrook, as head of the family, tried in vain to make up the quarrel. The enraged father (my uncle's first cousin) was an obstinate

old Sherbrook, with a great deal of the green bear in him. He told my uncle no one should interfere between him and his son, and requested Uncle Sherbrook to leave his house. The cousins never met again. I never even saw the crusty old Sherbrook. I know he died years before my uncle, and did not leave a farthing to his eldest son. He was dead when I came to live at Sherbrook Hall.

Had Uncle Sherbrook really been a crowned potentate as well as an infallible ruler, his cousin James would have been heir-presumptive to his throne and right divine: as it was, James Sherbrook was next-of-kin, but heir to nothing except the right divine, for the entail died with my uncle.

Uncle Sherbrook was not the man to let so near a relation starve. He had many drops of clannish Scotch blood in his veins; so when the living of Harefield fell vacant, he had presented it to his cousin James. Aunt Jane has often told me how “dear Edward sent for James, and spoke to him in such a sensible way, and gave him such good advice, and told him he had ruined his prospects in life and disgraced his family by a foolish, imprudent marriage (old Jack Jones’s granddaughter, and such a lover of dress!). And then Edward examined James—for you know, Sophy, your uncle was a clergyman once, before his elder brother died, and he still wears a white necktie, and never will have a moustache or a beard, but only very, very small whiskers; and Edward found James was quite sound in his views—and indeed, your uncle said James agreed with everything he said; so Edward gave James the living, and told him to preach the Gospel.”

The living is worth but little more than £200 a-year. The young couple fell into difficulties before they knew where they were. My mother told me Mary never seemed to realise they were in debt; but the Rector was horrified, and went and sold most of his furniture and all his pretty college knick-knacks and prints. He starved himself, tried hard to live upon nothing, and finally paid his debts. Had James Sherbrook been a nobleman, with £20,000 a-year, who had condescended to live on £5000 and pay his debts, every one would have pitied him, and the county would have rung with his praises. I imagine no one pitied the poor Sherbrooks, or praised them for their honesty and self-denial. I have constantly heard Aunt Jane say their difficulties served them right, for James had taken nobody’s advice when he married. Yet she was not unkind to them. She gave them a large family Bible, and a table to put it on; also a set of expensive but most uncomfortable dining-room chairs. “The children must not learn to loll at

their meals," said she. I know she said this,—she has often told me she did. When you live with Aunt Jane, you soon learn to know nearly everything she has said in the course of her life.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had looked upon these gifts with an evil eye. Whenever Aunt Jane wished to give James and Mary a present, Mrs Stewart would say, "Now, Mrs Sherbrook, if you take my advice, you will not waste your money upon those silly people. Let old Jack Jones come forward and give his granddaughter a proper fortune." If my uncle were present, Mrs Stewart did not mention Jack Jones; he would have considered any allusion to this sore point an insult. When a Sherbrook marries, the wife becomes a Sherbrook: society is bound to receive her as such. She herself is connected with her husband's relations, and not with her own, unless her own family happen to be in a good position.

Who in his senses could have imagined Uncle Sherbrook's cousin was connected with Jack Jones? My uncle had managed to indoctrinate my aunt with his ideas upon this subject; so when Mrs Stewart said that a clergyman's wife ought not to be ashamed of carrying her own baby through the village, as she had relations living there who were not accustomed to much style, Aunt Jane actually shook her curls in disapproval. She could hardly wait until the Rector had finished answering Mrs Stewart before she cried out, "Mary is not strong enough to carry her own baby through the village; and, James, don't advise her to try." A Sherbrook carrying her own infant through the village! What a sight for Harefield to see!

"Not strong enough!" exclaimed the admirable Catherine, in a bitter tone. She was evidently annoyed at my aunt's daring to advise against her advice. "Not strong enough! She will never be strong enough to be useful, unless she goes for a good, quick walk every morning. I tell you, James, her health will certainly break down if she takes no proper exercise. I see her just dawdling along by Smith's shop and looking in at the window."

Aunt Jane herself liked to look in at Smith's window; and whenever she drove that way, she stopped at the shop to buy a reel of thread. My aunt is not severe upon her own failings, even when they are the weaknesses of other people; so she said good-naturedly, "Smith has pretty things in his window, Catherine, and I once got a very nice dressing-gown there; it was a red flannel one, with black spots on it, and it was made after an excellent pattern."

The Rector seized this happy opportunity to put in a word for his poor little wife. "It amuses Mary," said he, "to look in at the shop-windows; she does not like walking backwards and forwards on the county road. I am sure, Jane," he continued, appealing to my aunt,—"I am sure, if you were to see how tired poor Mary is every morning after she has been teaching Jim and Jack their lessons, you would be glad she had any little amusement."

"And is it possible Mary teaches the boys? Well, I am glad to hear that," cried Aunt Jane; "I gave her Dr MacShaw's 'Lessons of Light in Little Lives'; so I hope, James, she reads it regularly to the children."

The Reverend James hummed and hawed, and answered with some embarrassment, "Yes; she reads it to them, and I have read it to them: but I don't know how it is, Jane, I think the world has changed since our youth. I do not find the children care for Dr MacShaw's books."

"They should be made to care for them," said my aunt, solemnly; "and, James, you should be firm, and continue to read Dr MacShaw's admirable lessons."

"But the children won't listen."

"Make them listen!" cried out the best of women from the tea-table.

"They go to sleep, Mrs Stewart."

"Punish them severely!"

"Yes, indeed, James," chimed in my aunt; "it is your duty to correct your children. 'Bring up a child in the way he should go, and he will not afterwards depart from it.'"

"'Chasten thy son while there is hope,'" exclaimed Mrs Stewart, "'and let not thy soul spare for his crying.'"

"'Wickedness,'" exclaimed Aunt Jane, "'is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.'"

Really it was too bad of these ladies to fling texts at the poor Rector; for had he remarked they were irrelevant, they would have called him *unsound*, and asked him if the Bible could be irrelevant? So I just thought I would quote the Scriptures too, and I said, "'Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath.'"

James Sherbrook turned round with a smile.

"Be quiet, Sophy!" burst in one breath from both Solomon's disciples; and Mrs Stewart cried out, "The idea of Sophy quoting the Holy Scriptures! She is quite blasphemous, I declare!" And my aunt cried out, "Really, Sophy, I did think you would give up arguing when your poor dear mother

died." Whereat the admirable Catherine exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, what makes you think the sight of an unchristian death could convert an unregenerate soul like Sophy's?"

My aunt took out her black-bordered handkerchief. "Poor dear Sophia!" sighed she—"poor dear Sophia!" And she added, turning towards the Rector, "There was no time to send for you, James: besides, there was no one to send, for George had to take care of the plate, and poor Snipkins was so overcome by grief that she could not even give a message rightly; and Robert and Thomas, and the horses, were at Vottingham with Edward. But oh! how I do wish my dear Sophia had seen a clergyman! because she never cared for prayers, and she never would talk to me about her soul, though I might have been the means, under Providence, of leading her to everlasting salvation."

"Do not grieve, Jane," said the Rector, kindly; "God is ever near us. He is with us in the hour of death. He is a comforter for whom we need not send far to find."

"Take care, James," cried Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, as if she were the Archbishop of Canterbury calling a chaplain to order—"take care what you are saying! That is not sound doctrine! We must search that we may find, and knock that it may be opened to us. Before you give an opinion, ask Sophy if her mother did anything of the kind. Now, Sophy, just come here! You always stick yourself in some back-of-beyond corner; so come out here and give me a second cup of tea, and tell James Sherbrook if at the last your mother had a conviction of sin, and was brought to experience the fulness of the Gospel truth. Tell him what signs she gave of repentance, and what she said when she was dying."

Some people are so strangely fashioned that they can go through all the details of their dearest friend's death-agony, like willing showmen; but to others this public violation of the sanctity of those last awful hours of passing life is fraught with pain—intense and sickening pain, such as the showman cannot even conceive. For my part, I bury my dead in my heart as in a grave; and I think of them always, but I do not wish to speak of them.

Mrs Stewart's words brought vividly to my still high-strung imagination the scene and all the circumstances of my mother's death: it was as if this woman had lifted up the shroud and called me to come and look upon the corpse again, and lecture to an audience on the anatomy of the now pulseless heart.

Coarse woman! her feelings are blunted, thought I; and I

drew back in disgust still farther from her, as I would have done had she really been an undertaker bidding me "Come! come! and look into the coffin, and tell how it was the lady died."

I think my face must have betrayed the horror I felt, for the Rector got up, and stood near Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, and said, in a voice that soothed me because it rang with a sympathetic indignation, "Mrs Stewart, it is not you nor I who should dare to say Mrs Thursley died an unchristian death. God alone has the right to judge the dead, for to God alone belongs mercy. We have no mercy, no pity, in our heart; we have no sympathy. We are too uncharitable;" and he added, in a tone that rose to anger, "we are too hard, Mrs Stewart."

The best of women let her tatting drop from sheer astonishment. And no wonder! I doubt if she had ever before seen James Sherbrook's sleepy eyes awakened, or known him moved to indignation.

"James," inquired my aunt, "what can be the matter with you, for you seem quite excited speaking to Catherine? And I tell you, James, what it is,—Mary has been giving you too strong tea; and there is nothing so bad for the nerves as strong tea, especially if there is any green in it. And, Catherine, if that is James's tea you are going to pour out, mind you put plenty of water in it. And now, James, if you would take my advice—"

Aunt Jane had the conversation to herself. Mrs Stewart remained silent; the tatting lay upon her lap. Her first look of amazement changed to one of bitterness and wrath when she fully realised that weak man the Rector had actually disagreed with her. Astounding fact! unlooked-for impudence!

Aunt Jane's fluid mind flowed on. It started from tea and the Rector's nerves, and touched on the cold compress, unsound doctrine, and the lowering of the franchise. "Duncan Stewart said this measure would be the ruin of the country, and so it is. And, you know, Duncan was Edward's third cousin, and he married first of all a Campbell, but she died; so what did he do but marry a young wife in his old age,—and an Irish lady too, and by no means strictly brought up! He met her at Harrogate—I meant to say Buxton. No, I am quite right—it was at Harrogate he met her; and the doctors had sent him there to drink the waters. Just like the doctors to send him there; and they quite mistook his complaint, and the waters nearly killed him. I hear she was pretty, and silly, and dressed like a Frenchwoman, and never went to church twice on Sunday unless

she had two new bonnets—one for the morning service, and one for the afternoon. And by the by, James, while I am talking of churches, you really ought to preach a sermon on the vanity of dress, because you could take your text from St Peter; and it might do the farmers' daughters and Smith's girls a great deal of good, for it quite shocks me when I look down from the gallery and see a flower-garden planted on the top of every woman's head. And Catherine and I set them such a good example! Before I went into mourning for poor dear Sophia, I always wore my plainest bonnet in church—indeed I did. And when I was young, I can assure you, James, it was a real pleasure to look down from the Abbey pew, for you saw nothing but nice tidy straw bonnets, with plain ribbons crossed on the top of them, for there used not to be an artificial flower in Harefield."

In a few seconds more, I think Aunt Jane's thoughts would have drifted on to the modern Babylon, had not Mrs Stewart interrupted their easy flow.

"Mrs Sherbrook," she cried, in her rasping voice, and fixing her small black eyes not on Aunt Jane, but on the Rector,— "Mrs Sherbrook, it is not we who set the fashion in Harefield church; we sit up in the gallery. When the clergyman's wife plays the harmonium near the reading-desk, all the girls in the village take the pattern of *her* bonnet. If she wears pink and grey ribbons and pink roses on Easter Sunday, Smith's daughters will copy her colours and her flowers before Whitsuntide."

The Rector's pale face flushed again, but he did not get angry. When a soft-natured, amiable man has given way to indignation, he is startled by his own vehemence, and seems to think he has put himself altogether in the wrong. The anger vanishes, and he falls into humility and repentance. The Rector rose to take leave. This was the best thing he could do under the circumstances, as he was too much of an amiable Christian to give the admirable Catherine what she deserved.

"Why are you in such a hurry, James?" said Aunt Jane; "and you have only had one cup of tea! Don't be afraid, James, for that tea will not do you any harm; so sit down again, and take another cup."

The Rector excused himself, but with difficulty. My aunt seemed to think he was running away solely because he feared to keep his nerves any longer in temptation.

James Sherbrook shook hands with the admirable Catherine. He said to her kindly, as if he wished to forgive her, "Mrs Stewart, I daresay my wife would be a wiser woman were she

a little less fond of a pretty bonnet. But I cannot find it in my heart to worry her by interfering in such small matters."

"Small matters!" retorted Mrs Stewart—"small matters indeed! Is it a small matter, Mr Sherbrook, to corrupt the taste of all the girls in Harefield?"

"Well," answered the Rector, "I never looked at it in that light. You may be right, Mrs Stewart."

"I declare," thought I, "he will agree with her. He likes to agree with everybody."

"When our little boy has quite recovered," continued the Rector, "I will try and give Mary a hint. I cannot speak to her at present, Mrs Stewart, for she is still anxious about the child."

My anger rose, and I came out of my corner. "Mr Sherbrook," said I, "don't tease your poor little wife. She is taking care of her children, and nursing that sickly crying infant. She is going to heaven, so let her go there in a pretty bonnet if she likes. There are plenty of disagreeable women going somewhere else in ugly ones,"—my voice grew louder—"women," cried I, "with evangelical pokes on their heads and tatting-bags upon their arms."

"Oh, James!" exclaimed my aunt, aghast, "Sophy said '*somewhere else*,' but I fear she meant to say something more dreadful still." My aunt spoke in a whisper, and looked as if she had made a terrible and wonderful discovery.

I think the Rector feared I might discuss the point, so he left the room in haste without another word. He never discussed questions of theology with me. Perhaps he was not quite sure what I might say; and as he liked agreeing with his adversary, this uncertainty was awkward. With the soundest intentions, he might have found himself agreeing to unsound doctrine.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart never liked me. When I told her for what place I considered disagreeable women, with ugly bonnets on their heads and tatting-bags upon their arms, were bound, I do not think she disliked me more than she had done before. Such remarks were "just like Sophy."

It will seem strange that, while I remained exactly where I

was in Mrs Stewart's estimation, the Rector's reproof—or rather, hint at a reproof—metamorphosed him into a perfect monster. James Sherbrook became “such a censorious, violent man—so rude! quite disgraceful for a clergyman!”

I know the best of women always disliked the heir-presumptive to my uncle's right divine; I think because she feared my uncle might make him the heir of something else besides. She longed to hate the Reverend James, so she seized the first opportunity and made the most of it. Out of the rambling conversation detailed in the last chapter, she forged a pair of tools with which she undermined Aunt Jane's good opinion of Edward's cousin James. It was possible to make Aunt Jane think anything, if you only knew how to manage her mind. Could I have condescended to become a flatterer, I might have twisted that mind round my finger. If you told Aunt Jane her own judgment was infallible and her own good sense unerring, she would let herself be entirely guided by yours. Snipkins knew this right well, and so did that saintly man Mr Boggle, and so did that clever woman Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart.

The admirable Catherine had, moreover, the knack of persuading her dear Mrs Sherbrook that dear Mrs Sherbrook had observed a great many things this good lady had never perceived at all—little points my aunt was incapable of noticing, impressions she had not imagination enough to receive. Aunt Jane had a way of looking and not seeing; but she thought herself singularly acute: so when she put on her excellent friend's spectacles, she was proud of her own unaided powers of sight and observation.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart persuaded Aunt Jane the Rector's visit had left two impressions on her mind—that is, on Aunt Jane's mind, not on Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's. The two impressions were: firstly, that James, though he was a clergyman, gave his children no religious instruction, but allowed them to grow up like undisciplined heathen; and secondly, that James had been exceedingly rude to Catherine, that he had quite lost his temper, and had behaved neither like a Christian nor a gentleman. Yes! James had gone out of his way to insult Catherine.

As I listened to Mrs Stewart, I discovered it is by no means difficult to make out that a very amiable man has a bad temper. You judge him by the standard of his own amiability. If he frowns, he has performed a miracle on purpose to insult you, or else you perceive what an exceedingly violent man he really is, only he does not show his temper like most people; he takes

good care to hide it. He is a hypocrite!—a hypocrite, and a rude, cross man! This is what that mild Christian, the Rector, became in a very few days. This is the impression Aunt Jane was brought to imagine James Sherbrook's own conduct and words had left upon her mind; for she believed she had a mind.

My aunt quite forgot she had parted from the Rector on the best of terms, and that she had merely thought his nerves were a little out of order. I said this to Aunt Jane; I begged her to think of the facts of the case, and not of her own impressions; I tried to reason with her, but I soon left off in despair! My aunt had come to a certain conclusion—she did not know how; she only knew that her conclusions were always right; and as to Sophy, did she ever take anybody's advice? or poor dear Sophia either? And then Aunt Jane would sail on from one thing to another, till I did not know where we were. How a woman runs before the wind if she has not got an anchor in her mind!

The Rector paid his memorable visit on a Wednesday. On the Saturday following, I heard Aunt Jane say to Mrs Stewart—"Perhaps I had better write to him, Catherine, and ask for an apology. Yes, that is the right course to take, and I am sure it is! for Edward will soon be asking James and Mary to dine. I know he will, for it is three months since the funeral; and how is it possible, Catherine, for you to meet James, unless he has offered you an ample apology?" "No, no, my dear Mrs Sherbrook! pray do nothing of the kind. I would not humble James Sherbrook for the world! I can forget! I can forgive!" I think Mrs Stewart saw she had gone far enough: she dissuaded Aunt Jane from writing to the Rector—she made her promise not to write—she spoke anxiously, energetically, as if she were tatting the promise into my aunt's brain, and fastening it there with a good strong knot.

I perceived Mrs Stewart had taken fright, and I knew why. Aunt Jane read most of the letters she wrote and all those she received to "Edward," and not unfrequently "Edward" read them over again to himself. He would read a business letter twice, perhaps three times. Mrs Stewart was aware a note such as Aunt Jane proposed sending the Reverend James would be considered a business letter by Uncle Sherbrook. The subject of it would become a matter of solemn inquiry. Mrs Stewart would have to state her grievance in the study. Sophy would be called as a witness, and who could tell what Sophy might not say? And then the admirable Catherine knew very well my uncle would not be adverse to giving a verdict in favour of

the Rector. The cousins were good friends: a ponderous infallible with a kind heart, but apt to be bilious, likes a modest, weak man of good feeling, and an amiable, yielding temper.

My uncle had not been particularly cordial to Mrs Stewart of late. He had shown signs of impatience more than once when she went tatting that steeple at dinner between the courses, instead of letting Satan find mischief for her hands to do as well as for her tongue.

One morning at breakfast, about a week after the Rector's visit, my uncle told Aunt Jane that Robert said the horses would get their death of cold if they continued to be taken out in the night dews, and that if the bay mare caught cold she would be a roarer for the rest of her days. I expect Mrs Stewart gave Robert a great deal of trouble and no "tips."

"Jane," said my uncle, "you must tell Mrs Stewart"—he never called her Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart—"Jane, you must tell Mrs Stewart what Robert says."

My aunt raised a cry of lamentation. "But, Edward," she exclaimed, "poor Catherine will have to walk! Her brown horse is ill, for he has never got well."

"No, nor never will get well," said my uncle, most decidedly; "ladies know nothing of horses. They keep them going all day and all night, make them take every hill at a gallop, and expect them to last for ever."

My uncle said this with an air of solemn conviction. He held very strong opinions on the subject of ladies and horses—opinions which Robert Jones took care should never grow weak. What really ailed the brown horse was over-starvation and old age. I knew this, but kept silence. I had no longer liveliness or courage enough to hint to Uncle Sherbrook that there might be other reasons for the brown horse's illness besides galloping up the Simplon.

"Tell Mrs Stewart," continued my uncle, "to give her horse away and to buy another, and then to get a coachman who can drive."

"What!" cried Aunt Jane; "get another coachman? and send away old Dan? And Catherine tells me he will attend at table, and dust the dining-room, and clean the boots, and look after the garden; and she says he can boil milk for her coffee when she has not got a cook; and Catherine would not send him away, because she says no one else would take him, so she keeps him from motives of Christian charity, for she is an excellent Christian-minded woman! and certainly, Edward, it is very good of Catherine to keep old Dan out of mere charity."

So it was ; and yet I could not help thinking that if Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart kept a younger man from other motives, he might not clean the harness, dust the dining-room, boil the milk, turn his hand to everything, and stay in her service without proper livery, proper food, and, above all, without his beer, like poor, old, battered Dan.

While I was thinking thus, Aunt Jane kept talking on about Christian charity, Sunday-schools, and old Dan. We are led to believe in our childhood that gold falls from the lips of good ladies. If so, Aunt Jane's mouth might be likened to an old-fashioned purse, with running-strings at the top. When the upper lip was dragged down, it looked tightly closed ; but let go the running-strings, and the bag was wide open, and all the gold poured out. My aunt was saying, "I can assure you, Edward, Dan has very good principles—Catherine says he has excellent principles ; for when he was a child he went to a Sunday-school in Aberdeen, and Dr MacShaw used to say the Lord's Word was taught north of the Tweed ; and we all know what early training can do either for good or for evil ; and Catherine finds Dan invaluable, for though he was brought up in Scotland, he belongs to the Church of England ; and Catherine thinks that all-important, and says she would not have a servant who belonged"

My uncle cut a slice of bread in two upon the wooden platter, with a look of serious determination in his face, as if he were severing Mrs Stewart's Dan and the brown horse from Robert and the bay roarer. "Jane, you are straying from the point," said he.

It was not often that Uncle Sherbrook said, "Jane, you are straying from the point ;" but when he did say these words, his manner made them impressive.

Aunt Jane had a great respect for her husband, and a sincere admiration for the intellectual and logical powers of his mind. Had my uncle spoken oftener and less slowly, I doubt if his wife would have considered him the great and wise man she did. Aunt Jane was always much impressed when "Edward" told her to keep to the point. I think she looked upon this concentration of mind as the result of that philosophical training which had enabled "Edward to take such a wonderful degree at college !" She generally made some remark to this effect, but she rarely made one to the point. On the occasion I speak of, she exclaimed,—"Straying from the point ! what point ? My dear Edward, remember I am not as great a philosopher as you are, for I never went to Cambridge like you !"

This compliment to his superior grasp of mind mollified my uncle.

"My dear Jane," said he, "I merely want to impress upon you that I should like Mrs Stewart to be told as soon as possible—this evening if you can—that Robert says the night dews will give the horses cold, and make the bay mare a roarer."

"Very well, Edward—very well," said my aunt; "I will tell Catherine what Robert says; but it certainly is a great pity the bay mare is so delicate; and I know Robert does think she is very delicate indeed, because I heard him telling Sophy if he were not careful to take her out cool, as he called it, and to bring her in cool, she would get some terrible disease, I think in the fetlock, or perhaps it was a spavin."

"Robert," said my uncle, "is a careful coachman; he knows what horses are, and he knows what ladies are. Let me tell you, Jane, you are most fortunate in having a man who refuses to gallop your horses to death." As if Aunt Jane ever had the smallest inclination to go out of a very slow trot!

My aunt began to eat her breakfast: she had nearly finished it when she exclaimed suddenly, the idea seemingly only striking her for the first time—

"Why, my dear Edward, if we do not send Catherine to Riverbank in the carriage, she cannot sleep at home. I forgot she could not walk back alone at night."

"She can sleep at home, Jane, by never leaving home." My uncle spoke like an oracle.

"And where is Catherine to dine?" cried Aunt Jane.

"In her own house," said my uncle.

"How can she dine at home without a cook?" asked my aunt, so excited in her mind that she miraculously kept to the point.

"She can get a cook," said Uncle Sherbrook.

"No, no, Edward! she can't! because she tells me all the cooks about here are Dissenters or Papists; and Catherine would take no one who did not belong to the Church of England and hold sound views; and you know we are just the same, Edward; and what should we have done? only our excellent Snipkins had a good-natured sister who kindly became a cook to please us; and you know Snipkins said to me . . ."

My uncle took up a blue-bugle which lay beside his plate. Aunt Jane talked on for some time; whenever she stopped to draw her breath I nodded my head and said, "Indeed!" She was quite satisfied, and went on again, and thought I was listening; but I have not a notion what she said.

Every morning at a quarter to twelve I went out with Aunt Jane, and we walked three times up and down the back avenue. Unless my aunt was in a huffy humour, she talked incessantly. She could make the same remarks and talk about the same things over and over again. As we took our last turn, she would wonder each day if Catherine would come to luncheon. She generally "wondered" standing on the same spot in the avenue. There were three elm-trees and a clump of laurel bushes so connected in my mind with Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, that when I saw them I thought of her.

But the whole avenue became associated in my imagination with this lady on the morning Uncle Sherbrook told Aunt Jane what Robert said about the horses catching cold in the night news. Ever after, a holly bush near the back lodge made me think of the bonnet in which the best of women collected for the conversion of the French infidels; for it was the kindness, the sympathy, the good feeling, the tenderness, the affection, the heartfelt sorrow shown by that excellent creature Catherine in wearing her black evangelical coal-scuttle as a tribute of respect to my mother's memory, which made Aunt Jane feel she would be an ungrateful wretch if she let Mrs Stewart dine by herself at Riverbank. It was a clever instinct which prompted this keen-sighted flatterer to lay aside the bonnet with the red feather and the sound but moderate views. It gave Aunt Jane real pleasure to see her friend wear mourning, because there is no doubt that she derived much satisfaction from the black look of the people around her. Her own crape was awful to behold; she would not even wear a white collar. I often saw her gaze at me with an air of mournful satisfaction, for she and Madame Julie Browne had put me into a complete suit of "orphan's mourning." My appearance was ghastly—it shocked me when I saw myself in the glass.

During our last turn on the back avenue, Aunt Jane slackened her pace (as usual) when we were passing the three elm-trees and the laurel bushes.

"I wonder if Catherine will come to luncheon!" cried she. "Poor dear creature! she has not got a cook! and I greatly fear she will not be able to get one before Christmas; and what is she to do until the brown horse gets well if we cannot send her home in the evening? And, Sophy, did you hear your uncle say the brown horse never would get well? and Edward knows a great deal about horses; and if he thinks the bay mare will become a roarer, I am quite sure she will, so I cannot ask him to send Catherine home any more; so I will

tell you what I will do—I will ask Catherine to come and spend the month of December with us, for I am sure Edward will be delighted to have her staying in the house at Christmas. She is such an excellent, indefatigable, cheerful creature, always occupied in a good work, and full of nice feeling. To think of her going into mourning for poor dear Sophia! Indeed I can never forget . . .”

Really, I had thought the subject of the black bonnet was exhausted at the other end of the avenue! I thought we had left it sticking in the holly bush; but Aunt Jane started upon it afresh, as if the evangelical poke were a new topic! I am thankful to say she had not been talking very long before I heard the warning-bell. She heard it too, and hurried home so fast that she got out of breath and could not speak.

When we sat down to luncheon, I found my aunt had quite recovered the use of her tongue. It would have been pleasanter for my uncle had she remained speechless a little longer.

I need hardly say Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart sat opposite me at table.

With characteristic want of tact, Aunt Jane told her what “Edward” had said about the horses. “And now, my dear Catherine,” said she, “you really must come and stay here, as you have not got a cook; and you must spend the month of December with us, for you will cheer us up at Christmas.” She appealed to my uncle. “Now, Edward, must not Catherine come and stay here? Don’t you insist upon it?”

I pitied Uncle Sherbrook. A look of anger and disgust crossed his face; but he kept his temper wonderfully. He had all the fine old-fashioned ideas of good-breeding and hospitality in his own house.

“Mrs Stewart,” said he, with formal politeness and great self-command—“Mrs Stewart, I insist upon nothing, but I beg you will do me the honour to accept Mrs Sherbrook’s invitation.”

For a sincere man, this speech was the triumph of good manners.

The quick-sighted Catherine threw one of her penetrating glances at my uncle. I am convinced those black eyes of hers could read people’s thoughts. I actually admired the woman: she was so clever!

In one look she saw how things were, and she refused the invitation—although I am sure she was dying to accept it. Aunt Jane pressed her to say she would come. “Come, Catherine, come and spend Christmas with us, for you know you

have not got a cook." But Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart refused bravely. She explained to us how she felt bound to put her hand to the plough and go forth amongst her friends, praying them to give their mite towards the maintenance of the Society for the Promotion of Christianising Influences in the Homes of the East, of the Society for the Promotion of True Religion in Infidel Lands, and of other societies engaged in promoting godliness and morality at home and abroad. My uncle was so pleased at her steadfast refusal, that his manner softened towards her.

In the course of that afternoon, I happened to be crossing the hall, and I saw Robert Jones coming out of the study. "Ho, ho!" I said to myself, "Uncle Sherbrook is so glad to get rid of the admirable Catherine, that he will send her home in the carriage to-night. Now that he is sure she is going away, he and Robert will think the bay mare may venture out without becoming a roarer."

I found I was quite right; for when we were leaving the dinner-table, my uncle bowed, and said with Chesterfield urbanity, "Mrs Stewart, I have spoken to my coachman; and the night being fine, he apprehends no ill effects should the horses be taken out. The carriage will therefore be at your disposal at whatever hour you may wish to name."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart looked quite elated. Her self-denial was rewarded: had she not stepped back again into my uncle's good graces? She thanked him, and said she would leave immediately after prayers.

"You will understand, Mr Sherbrook, and you will appreciate, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, my wish to remain until after the evening sacrifice of prayer and praise."

I cannot be bored repeating the Magnificat Aunt Jane thereupon sang in honour of the best of women. It was no short hymn of praise, for it went on most of the evening.

As I talked to my uncle, by the fireside, of the weather, I heard my name mentioned. Like the word *Selah* in the Psalms, it sounded foreign to the text; so I looked round, and beheld Aunt Jane shaking her curls and casting up her eyes. Mrs Stewart had laid down her shuttle, and I saw her take a handful of tracts out of the tatting-bag, and give them to my aunt; and then there was another shake of the head, and the Magnificat began again.

The parting between Aunt Jane and her excellent friend was like that of two kissing, loving schoolgirls. Mrs Stewart took out her handkerchief (a black-bordered one) and held it to her eyes.

Next morning I was late for the Commentary. I could not get on my stockings ; I could not put on my shoes ; there was something stuck in the armhole of my dress ; and I could not find room for a handkerchief in my pocket. Pocket, sleeves, shoes, and stockings were all stuffed with tracts ! A tract prevented the right shoe from fitting me, and a tract filled the toes of the left one. When I put my hand into my pocket, I pulled out, "Old Buttons for New Buttonholes," "Large-eyed Needles for Christian Camels," "Satan's Sops to Sinners' Souls ; or, Modern Mops for Mighty Miracles," and "Cheap Chopsticks from the Charitable Christian to the Chinese, by the author of 'Nut-crackers for the Negroes ;'" and I dragged the "Accepted Assassin ; or, Have You Killed the Old Adam ?" out of my stocking.

Really no writers can be more scandalously silly, when they are not blasphemous, than the truly pious authors of some evangelical tracts.

CHAPTER XVII.

Many little things had proved a consolation to Aunt Jane during the first three months after her sister's death. It had taken her all that time to answer the letters of condolence she had received ; not because the letters were numerous, but rather because Aunt Jane liked answering them at length. It was not in her nature to dash off such letters without texts and forethought. I also discovered there was enduring consolation for my aunt in the plumes and weepers and gloom of the funeral. I had noticed Aunt Jane was continually holding a scrap-book in her hand ; she hardly ever held a book, so my curiosity was excited, and I took up the scrap-book : it opened of itself where a piece cut out of the 'Dullshire News' was pasted in. This extract proved to be an account of my mother's funeral ! A sort of undertaker's description of plumes and scarves, and mutes, and mourning-coaches ; and of a brass-nailed, brass-plated velvet coffin, containing inner ones of polished deal and lead. Disgusted, I let fall the book ! My aunt astounded me.

"What balm for a heartache !" cried I ; and I stooped down and picked up the scrap-book, and laughed as I glanced over the description again. Hideous mutes ! Had I not seen them ? and oh ! what a sight they were, aping a grief they did not

feel ! as if there was not grief enough in the world without a make-believe ! And is it not comforting to read how the person we loved best on earth lies down in the grave, hidden away for ever in a velvet coffin with a brass-plate on the top, and nails all round,—safely imprisoned in a jail without door ? How comforting to think she never can come back again ! How comforting ! laughed I ; how comforting ! But as I laughed, the tears choked me.

When the admirable Catherine said good-bye, I had given a sigh of relief. If good women must tatt steeples, what a blessing it is, thought I, when they no longer tatt them within our sight and hearing !

Had any one told me that before two months were past, I should be wishing Mrs Stewart back again, how I should have laughed that person to scorn. But a change of feeling will sometimes come over us unawares, like old age. It is not to-day our hair turned grey, nor yesterday, nor the day before ; nor yet was it suddenly, between sunrise and sunset, that I discovered the best of women had been a blessing to me, because she had been an occupation to Aunt Jane, and a leader to a mind which could not lead itself. Little by little it dawned upon me that I ought to have felt grateful to that hard woman for her want of feeling, and for her clattering, " happy release " way of talking. Besides, she had a good appetite, and never got hysterics ; so Aunt Jane followed her example, and ate well, and did not cry. And then my aunt found such pleasant excitement in wondering each morning on the back avenue if Catherine would come to luncheon. And how it filled her vacant brain to think of Catherine's horse, and her bonnet, and her good works, and her unchristian sisters-in-law, and her rude enemies, and her quarrels, and her cook. Oh, that cook ! " Dear, excellent, indefatigable creature ! Why, she has not got a cook !" What endless conversation may lie in an empty kitchen !

Aunt Jane had been excited and amused without knowing it. She no longer missed " poor, dear Sophia." Why should she ? They had lived apart for years. Her sister might just have been in town ; not dead. Truly death is only half a grief if during life you have been able to live happily out of sight of the friend whose loss you mourn. It is a sorrow easily borne if you can walk on from the grave and forget for one moment you are alone. The pang of separation is only known to those who as they walk must turn at every step and listen, but never hear the footstep, the voice they long to hear : who must look, but cannot see the face they love.

When Aunt Jane was beginning to be comforted, I was only beginning to know the full bitterness of my misery. The shock of the sudden death had benumbed me for months after I thought that I had awokened from the first dull stupor. My mother's death, coming without warning, had indeed been a great shock to me. Death had stolen, as I might say, up the back-stairs in the midst of bad tempers, unpunctuality, Miss Hemmer's coals, Snipkins's ill-nature, and Uncle Sherbrook's crossness and fuss—all so important, and death unperceived. In our heart we ever think death will come like a king, with trumpeters and guards. If he slips in alone at the back-door while the cook is scolding, we do not even know him, till of a sudden we open our eyes and see he stares us in the face.

Aunt Jane did not take much notice of me until Mrs Stewart had gone some little way on her collecting tour. It unfortunately then struck her that I did not look in good spirits. She took into her head my sorrow was greater than hers, and this piqued her. "Poor dear Sophia! my own sister! and I knew her before Sophy was born!"

Aunt Jane actually became jealous of my grief—more from want of occupation than from anything else. This will only seem incredible to those who do not know what the vacant minds of some women are made of.

And so it happened that when Aunt Jane began to be comforted, she lamented the loudest. I could not see her weep unmoved. I had grown weak in nerves and mind, and I dreaded this weakness which I felt was overmastering me. When tears, midnight tears unnerve us, we long in that hourly struggle for self-command to be alone; or if we cannot be alone, we long for some strong tearless heart to live with us in sympathy, and yet in silence—not lamenting, not harping on the thought which fills us both. I have heard of two captives chained together in one dungeon, who grew to hate each other more than they hated the men who had chained them in their cell. If the prisoners were two weak, crying women, I believe the tale. Oh, what nerveless misery it is for two hysterical women to be chained together!

I wished we had seen more of Uncle Sherbrook. It is true he was not sympathetic; but he was calm, and did not cry, and Aunt Jane became almost rational in his presence.

He lived in his study. There were iron safes for the wills and title-deeds in that study—locked boxes, with other boxes and drawers locked inside them. I came to think Uncle Sherbrook was very like one of these big chests: he had been open once, but his

sympathy and heart seemed all shut up again, and he tried to keep them safely locked. I perceived he was ashamed of having betrayed so much feeling at the time of my mother's death ; yet I do not think my uncle repented of the kind words he had said to me, or had forgotten them, for in the evening after dinner he would draw an old-fashioned, long-legged, calico-covered stool beside his own arm-chair ; and I knew he liked me to go and sit there for an hour, and talk to him about the weather. Had Uncle Sherbrook had a daughter of his own, I knew he would have drawn the calico-stool for her ; so, although it was uncomfortable, and I was bored to sit there and bored to talk for an hour of the weather, I still in a sort of way liked to sit by my uncle's side, because I thought he liked to have me there, and the world felt less cold to me.

I often wished some one might be invited to dinner, for then perhaps I could have talked of something else besides the weather : unless there are great thunderstorms and hurricanes, I soon tire of this subject. As ill-luck would have it, the Rector caught the measles from his children, or I am sure my uncle would have insisted on asking him and Mary to dine. Now there was no chance of our seeing any of the rectory people, old or young, for the next two . . . for the next three months. "Sophy," Aunt Jane repeated constantly ; "Sophy, you must not go near the rectory, for your uncle has never had the measles, and I know he has not, though he thinks he has, and they are very dangerous at his age ; and indeed I hope James may recover ; but it is so like Dr Daly, never to have discovered the baby had the measles, for I am sure that is what the child really had all the time ; and it is so like Mary not to have isolated James when the other children were ill ; for even if they had run all over the house, Mary might have kept James in the back kitchen, because it is not so small a place as you imagine, Sophy ; for Edward improved all that part of the rectory when he gave the living to James."

Aunt Jane was kind in sending soups and jellies to the rectory ; and it was a great pity James Sherbrook could not come himself to thank her while Mrs Stewart was away on her collecting tour. I know my aunt would have completely forgiven him for being "so rude to Catherine," and would have forgotten he did not bring up his children in the way they should go. Besides, she would have been delighted to see any one : it would have amused her, and there would have been a satisfaction in giving "James and Mary" good advice, and a positive pleasure in correcting the children, now that we never saw a soul, or went

anywhere, not even for a drive! Robert said the bay mare wanted a thorough good rest. There was a little open carriage we might have driven in with one horse, but Robert kept that carriage at the back of the coach-house.

Lady Arabella Scott wrote to Aunt Jane asking if she might come and see her. This was very kind of Lady Arabella, as it was a long winter's drive from Mineham to Sherbrook.

"Lady Arabella is really no relation," said Aunt Jane; "and I fear it is rather too soon to receive strangers."

My aunt told me she wrote back, saying that at present she was in too deep mourning to receive her friends, however dear they might be. I am sure it gave Aunt Jane real pleasure to write this letter on very black-edged paper. All the same, I was surprised to find she was a little huffed with Lady Arabella for taking her at her word.

Aunt Jane would have liked visitors to come, but she would have wept on meeting them. She liked to cry.

I do not wonder poor Aunt Jane thought herself inconsolable; for, by giving way to tears like a child who will not stop crying when it can, and then cannot stop when it will, she had really fallen into a miserably hysterical state. Snipkins, for reasons of her own, had persuaded my aunt she was in too great sorrow to look after the dairy, and far too delicate to think of house-keeping. The maid had cleverly convinced her mistress that certain damp chills of a peculiarly fatal kind lurked in the atmosphere of the housekeeper's room. "Sometimes hi himagines," she would say, "before this 'ere 'ouse was built, there may have been a set of private vaults, hor a regular cemetery, hor it might be ha hancient monks' moshorleem, just under where hi sits hat dinner. Taking honly cold water has hi do, there hare days when I feel ha very sing'lar sort of chill harising hunder the table. Helizabeth 'as to get me a stool for my feet, which 'as become ha mass of chilblains. Hi would not hallow my precious mistress to get a chill. Chills in February hare fatal to the constitution. Hif hi 'ad not the care of my dear mistress, she might go hoff sudden hany day. Mrs Thursley's delicacy was has a mere nothing to 'ers. Hif hi'd 'ad the hovering of that poor dear lady, she'd be halive now. But Miss Sophy, she'd kill hany one ha crocking hof them with fires in Horgus hin hother people's 'ouses, and, hi've little doubt, ha freezing hof them hin winter hat 'ome like hartic women!"

Aunt Jane believed her maid, yet was miserable at having nothing to do. So wretched was she that I took pity on her, and tried to amuse and comfort her, till she grew accustomed to

have me always with her ; and then she would not let me out of her sight.

I had the terrible misfortune to become her occupation in life.

Aunt Jane fancied she spent the morning in the study with "Edward," occupied about very important business,—in reality she never stayed there more than five minutes at a time. Mr Boggle was still a saint, but no longer a novelty. My aunt only cared for the gossipping, sensational sort of business, such as the dismissal of an attorney, or a farmer, or a servant. She liked a squabble about a neighbour's land ; she enjoyed maintaining the right-of-way nearly as much as my uncle did, and she dearly loved helping her husband to make his will. I suppose Uncle Sherbrook had plenty of wills made at the time I speak of, because Aunt Jane never ceased running into the drawing-room to see what "Sophy" was doing.

One morning I had escaped with a book into solitude upstairs, and my aunt was in my room before I had time to sit down. What a scene we had !

"Sophy, why don't you read down-stairs ? I know you run away from me because you think I am a murderer ! You think I killed poor, dear Sophia ! "

It must have been Snipkins who kept putting this idea into Aunt Jane's head, for it could not have stayed there by itself. When Dr Daly had reproached my aunt beside her sister's death-bed with having lost the only hope, I can believe she may have felt remorse all that day and perhaps the next ; but Aunt Jane is a self-deceiver,—I know her ! She and Uncle Sherbrook are infallibles with short memories ; and, if let alone, they never think themselves in the wrong for more than forty-eight hours.

"Yes, Sophy, yes !" Aunt Jane exclaimed ; "you think I am a murderer ! You think I killed poor, dear Sophia ! "

I could not hear these oft-repeated words without a shudder. They brought before my mind the death-scene I was struggling to forget ; and it is so difficult to forget what you feel you remember each hour of the day and night !

"No, Aunt Jane," I said. "No ; I only like to be alone. There is comfort in silence."

"Comfort !" cried she ; "comfort ! As if I did not want comfort more than you, Sophy ! As if I did not feel poor, dear Sophia's death—my own poor sister's death—more than any one else in the world could feel it ! But you think I have no heart, Sophy !—you think I have no heart ! I know you do ! "

My aunt burst into tears. I could not be cruel and go away

and leave her alone, so I sat beside her for two long hours, offering her water, bathing her forehead, holding her hand, and soothing her with soft words ; but when I dried her tears, she wept again.

At twenty minutes to twelve, Aunt Jane had her very black "walking things" brought into my room. She said she did not feel strong enough to go into her own. Snipkins dressed her and moaned over her. "My poor, dear mistress!" moaned she. "What an 'eart she 'as—so hovercome! and hif hit hisn't four months since the death and hagoing hon for five! Hi'll be bound, Miss Sophy's hat the bottom hof this!—she's been rehopening hof the wound! But the Lord sends heverything for our good! 'Eartless, reproachful nieces is halmost better for our souls than kind and Christian-minded ones!"

I never answered Snipkins a word. I had not spoken to her since the day of my mother's death. Silence was no pain to me,—the senseless misery of scenes like this bewildered me.

When Aunt Jane was ready she leant upon my arm, and we went out and walked three times up and down the back avenue. Snipkins had persuaded my aunt she would catch cold if she took even one turn for a change in the kitchen-garden. As to the flower-garden, it was too damp to be thought of for an instant. Aunt Jane dreaded a chill ; she was afraid of being "carried off suddenly, like poor, dear Sophia." I know she feared it, because when she spoke of my mother's death, she never failed to say, "A mere chill would not have killed Sophia at her age. So she must have had a weakness of the heart as well as disease of the liver ; and, Sophy, your uncle and I never had anything the matter with our heart."

During our walk my aunt kept down her thick crape veil, while my face was uncovered. She became calmer, perhaps because she was soothed by knowing she looked the blackest picture of woe, although no one saw her but the crows.

She told me with her last sob that she forgave me. I did not care to ask what sin I had committed to require pardon. I was only too glad my aunt imagined she had forgiven me. I knew that for the present the play was at an end, and I rejoiced to find we were not at the first scene of a long day of tears and huffiness.

Another day, one afternoon, I escaped alone to the path over the hill, leaving Aunt Jane to walk down the front avenue with Uncle Sherbrook. My aunt would not speak to me for three whole days ! Fancy what she must have suffered in holding her tongue ! She looked the most injured of mortals, and

sobbed if I left the room, or if I opened a book instead of talking to her—yet she would not answer me if I did speak. But she liked me to speak, so that she might keep silence, and show she was offended. A grievance was an event in life to her, if noticed and made much of ; if unnoticed, it made no sensation, and therefore was no event.

Aunt Jane complained to Uncle Sherbrook of my unkind conduct. She told him I would sit and walk apart, and leave her alone for an hour at a time.

“Sophy,” said my uncle, “I am much occupied by important business. Even when I am able to walk with your aunt, my mind is too much engaged to allow of my talking, or indeed of my listening much to what is said. It is your duty, Sophy, as it should be your pleasure, to be your aunt’s constant companion and to administer to her amusement.”

My uncle said these words severely, but that was merely his way of speaking. I knew he did not mean to be hard. I was so accustomed to minds with blind sides, like boxes which only open at the top, that Uncle Sherbrook’s speech sounded quite natural in my ear. I felt, if I had energy, I might perhaps put a new view of the matter into his head, but my brain was addled ; I could explain nothing, not even to myself. I was puzzled and weary. Weary of life !

Oh, how wearisome, how wearisome is life, when the heart is empty, and the wasting hungry mind is forbidden to satisfy itself, because others have no appetite ! Aunt Jane, unfortunately, was a perfectly unintellectual woman—not from want of education, but from some peculiarity of mind. She had a positive prejudice against books, though she herself did not know it. In fact, she imagined herself to be a great reader, and thought she had read every book worth reading that was not of an atheistical tendency.

It is true she occasionally read out some piece of sound doctrine from a religious newspaper ; and it is also true that she went to sleep on Sunday with Dr MacShaw’s ‘Wisdom of the West ; or, Ethics of the East,’ or else with his Commentary open on her lap ; but every other day of the week, except the blessed Sabbath, Aunt Jane seemed to associate books with bad manners ! It was bad manners for me to read in the evening, bad manners to read at any time in the drawing-room or in the library, and worse to go to your own room and read there. At rare times, on very wet mornings, when the back avenue was quite out of the question, Aunt Jane would take up a book and let me open one also ; but when I had opened it, she did not

let me read it, for the little she herself read of her own tract, she liked to read aloud with marked emphasis. Aunt Jane's never-ceasing flow of talk tired me to death, for no matter what subject she began with, she soon fell into the words and sayings I had heard before—a hundred times before! And there was no one to listen to her but me!

I grew so wearied from listening to her, that one morning I actually caught myself on the back avenue, wondering with Aunt Jane if Catherine would stay away for ever!

"If Gordon-Sherbrook is really ill"—Gordon-Sherbrook was Mrs Stewart's only son—"if Gordon-Sherbrook is really ill," said my aunt, "and if the regiment is really going to Malta, Catherine may have to spend the winter at . . . at Corfu."

"At Corfu, Aunt Jane? I think she might perhaps be nearer her son at Valetta; though," added I, "he may prefer to have his mother at Corfu."

"Where is Valetta?" asked my aunt. She had arrived at the age when our geography becomes a vague memory of our youth.

"It is in Malta, Aunt Jane."

"What did I say?"

"You said Corfu."

"Now, Sophy, you know perfectly well I meant Valetta; but you delight in arguing and contradicting, and I know you think I am always in the wrong! You think every one is in the wrong but yourself; and I know you think I killed poor, dear Sophia!"

She shed tears. "I pray," cried she, "I pray to the Lord night and morning that He may take me to Himself, for your constant reproaches are killing me."

"I never reproach you, Aunt Jane," said I, sternly; for I had never done so, and I alone knew how difficult it was to keep the promise of forgiveness I had given her in a moment of excitement and despair.

"There! there!" exclaimed my aunt, "you are going to argue again! But Snipkins knows you reproach me; Snipkins says she is sure you are always reproaching me with your poor, dear mother's death."

"Snipkins! Snipkins!" cried I; and then I stopped. I drove back the words which rose to my lips. This time it was an effort to me; but oh! thought I, what is the use of talking reason to a weeping tongue like this one?

There was no use. I knew there was none. And, indeed, I began to doubt if I had any reason left in my own poor head.

The stream of Aunt Jane's mind flowing by my side, pouring worries over my life, and like a river where no rock turns the tide, ever flowing on, on to an open, a confused sea, made me feel as if my own bewildered brain had turned to water. I felt as if I never could think again, as if my power to grasp a clear idea were gone.

I longed to leave Sherbrook Hall. I was miserable there, but I could not help feeling my uncle did not wish me to go. I knew he liked to have me, partly, perhaps, because I relieved him of the trouble of listening to Aunt Jane. I did not want to leave Uncle Sherbrook's house in an ungracious manner, as if I hated it, and yet I grew so impatient of the slowly-passing, tedious hours and days and weeks and months, that my longing could no more be stifled. I determined to tell Uncle Sherbrook I wished to go back to my own home. I thought it would be much easier to tell him so when Aunt Jane was not by; but I despaired of ever getting the chance of seeing him alone. Aunt Jane seemed to be always following me everywhere.

At last my opportunity did come.

Snipkins had written to London for a large quantity of groceries. Aunt Jane luckily happened to see the box arrive, and she wondered so incessantly what could be inside it, that Snipkins kindly permitted her to see it unpacked. A roaring fire was lighted in the housekeeper's room, Snipkins's own armchair was put exactly before it, and Aunt Jane, as if risking her life, was carefully wrapped in a shawl, and, nearly dying of heat, was allowed to see her own tea and coffee and sugar weighed. This ceremony could not in any way prove injurious to the housekeeper's perquisites, as Snipkins's "precious mistress" had no notion how long ninety pounds of tea might be supposed to last in the servants' hall. It was wise of Snipkins to permit my aunt to see her own groceries weighed. Aunt Jane seemed grateful to her maid; she also felt she was mistress in her own household, and knew by experience that she ruled her servants and managed her affairs with order and economy.

I was sure the grocery ceremony would occupy hours, so when once I had seen Aunt Jane safely installed over the "hancient monks' moshorleem," I made my way to the study.

My uncle had been very kind to me. I could not forget his saying—"Sophy, I will be your father; I have no child but you." I had therefore been at great pains to invent a little speech, so turned that I thought it could not possibly hurt his feelings, or make him think I was unhappy in his house. I repeated this

little speech to myself several times, for fear I should not remember it at the right moment. And yet this is just what happened! When I found myself actually in the study, alone with Uncle Sherbrook, the speech went out of my head. I could think of nothing better to say than "Uncle Sherbrook, have . . . have you got a Bradshaw?" Even this I said awkwardly, blushing at each word.

To my unspeakable surprise and dismay, I saw Uncle Sherbrook understood what my question really meant. I intended to have led up to the subject little by little. My uncle frowned, and pushing aside the blue paper he had been writing upon, leant over his desk, and looked at me without speaking. At first his look was all astonishment and indignation; then a grieved expression crossed his face, and I was sorry to see it.

I stammered out a few words; then stopped short, shocked to find I was on the very point of saying—"I would live with you, Uncle Sherbrook, only I am too unhappy—I feel worried to death." I stopped just in time, and mumbled these words instead—"You are very kind to me; I am very grateful; I will come back to you when I am in better spirits."

My uncle did not speak. I am no match for silent people—they frighten me. So I kept silence too.

Uncle Sherbrook replaced the sheet of foolscap in the middle of his desk, and began to write. I knew I ought to take the hint and go away, and still I sat on. He continued writing, but after a little I noticed the pen in his hand did not move.

"Sophy," he said at length, not looking up at me, but with his eyes fixed upon his desk—"Sophy, you . . . you have no ready money to spend on keeping house." There was unusual embarrassment in my uncle's manner. "Before you make any plans, you . . . well, Sophy, you had better speak to Mr Jones."

"Mr Jones? the attorney?" I exclaimed, greatly astonished, for I was under the impression Uncle Sherbrook shared Aunt Jane's prejudice against that Arian and Unitarian, the sacrilegious Jones.

"Jones was your mother's man of business," answered my uncle, laying aside his pen, and leaning back in his chair, as if disposed to talk. "He is acquainted with the true state of your affairs. I have consulted him about them since your mother's death, Sophy. I have had a few . . . one or two interviews, with Jones of late."

"Does . . . does Mr Jones come here regularly, as well as Mr Boggle?" I asked, wondering how many attorneys my uncle could accommodate in his study.

"Sophy," replied Uncle Sherbrook, hurriedly, "I have consulted Jones at his own house, but . . . you need not mention it to your Aunt Jane." My uncle then explained to me that it would be a slight on Mr Boggle were Mr Jones to be seen at Sherbrook Hall. "It is impossible, Sophy," he said, "for you to receive Jones here, as Boggle would feel insulted. He would think, and not without reason, that I had purposely disregarded the rules of professional etiquette. And were Boggle to take offence, I might perhaps find a difficulty in explaining matters to your aunt. Ladies are apt to see things in more than one light. They have a certain natural deficiency of reasoning power, which makes it a somewhat arduous task for their mind clearly to perceive the point of an argument. Boggle is a man of business esteemed by your aunt, and deservedly so—most deservedly so. You will therefore understand, Sophy, how it becomes impossible that I should make an appointment for you in this house with your mother's legal adviser. Yet, on the other hand, I should not wish you to consult Jones in a manner which might be hurtful to the feelings of a professional man who, whatever his shortcomings may be, was for many years my agent and trusted adviser. I cannot forget that he and I fought and won our great case together." And my uncle almost smiled! I fancy he could not look back unmoved upon those ten pleasant years of right-of-way lawsuit.

Uncle Sherbrook, having reflected a moment in silence, said the bay mare was better than usual, and might, he thought, be taken out, so he proposed to order the carriage immediately, and send me in it, without further delay, to consult Mr Jones. "Jones," said he, "is always at home on Wednesday morning."

I thanked my uncle, and was leaving the room, when he called me back to say—"I understand your aunt is occupied down-stairs. There is no necessity for you to disturb her at present. The sooner you start, Sophy, the better."

The carriage had come to the door, and I was in it and just starting, when Uncle Sherbrook came running through the hall. Heavens! actually running! The bay mare is a roarer! thought I; but nothing of the sort. Uncle Sherbrook came to say a parting word. He put his head through the open window—"Nearer, Sophy," he said, "nearer!" and then in my ear—"I do not want Thomas to hear. Give this note to Jones. I am anxious to know if he agrees with Boggle on a point of some importance. Bring me back his answer." And, whispering so low I could barely catch the words—"You need not mind telling your aunt I have consulted Jones."

For the first time since my mother's death, I laughed heartily. "I declare," cried I, "a Boggle three times a-week is not enough! Uncle Sherbrook would like a Jones and a Boggle day about!" I kept wondering all the way into Harefield why Uncle Sherbrook was sending me to see Mr Jones, and why I had not any ready money, and why, if Uncle Sherbrook knew I had not any, he did not tell me the reason himself. But if I wondered until I saw Mr Jones, I wondered much more before I left his office.

Old Jones had known me from a child. He seemed much pleased to see me arrive in all the glory of the Sherbrook family-coach, and at first he made so many inquiries about my own health, and so many about Uncle Sherbrook and his health, and was altogether so elaborately polite, that I thought we should never come to business.

However the time finally did arrive, when the old man benignantly said he presumed I wished to consult him about the state of my late lamented mother's affairs. Placing a solemn-looking leather arm-chair for me, he requested me to be seated. After a somewhat lengthy exordium, he told me Uncle Sherbrook had persuaded my mother to take shares in a bank to the amount of £100. This bank was under the enlightened management of an eminent philanthropist.

"You must have heard of this gentleman, Miss Thursley," said Mr Jones. "He was an acquaintance—an intimate acquaintance—of Mr Boggle's. It was Mr Boggle who introduced him to your uncle, Mr Sherbrook. I need hardly say it was contrary to my advice that Mrs Thursley invested in this concern."

I remembered the man's name as that of a great Light who loved all men, particularly the blacks.

Shortly after my mother's death, it seems, this philanthropist had disappeared. The bank broke. Many poor people had shares in it; maiden ladies who believed black men were superior to white, perhaps because they had never heard of there being old maids in Africa; and clergymen, and widows of the clergy. There were also some rich shareholders, principally dissenters, whom the philanthropist had fascinated when he went on his annual collecting tour in aid of the establishment of an enlightened republic on the coast of Africa.

I was sure my mother would never have given her money into the hands of such a man, unless she had been bothered to do so; but she was easily worried into doing a thing. I had seen her teased into hemming pocket-handkerchiefs for Hot-

tentots, and bothered into taking guinea tickets for concerts when she had no guineas to spare.

"Well, Mr Jones," I said, "after all, my mother had only £100 in this bank. When I go home I can be economical, and I will soon pay the money. I would send away the servants now, only I do not like parting with old acquaintances; besides, I doubt if old John would let himself be sent away."

The pleasant, easy manner in which I spoke of my loss seemed to astound the attorney. "Miss Thursley," he exclaimed, "you appear to be labouring under some strange delusion. Is it possible you can bring yourself to imagine that gentlemen, whose own resources are not unlimited, would become managers of concerns where the liability is strictly limited to the sum invested?"

Mr Jones hereupon entered into a lengthy explanation of the difference between limited and unlimited liability. He made use of many legal terms, and diverged to "cases in point," and went into "apt illustrations of this matter," telling me to suppose A B had lodged money with C D. I thought the old man rather long-winded, so I began to look about the room and admire the wonderful caligraphy and red lines of a deed. Mr Jones's learned disquisition merely left on my mind the impression that, if any two letters of the alphabet lodge money with any other two, ruin comes of it.

I was afterwards sorry for my inattention, when I discovered my mother's old agent had been trying all this time to break bad news to me by means of A B's and C D's. At last my blind stupidity drove him to speak plainly, without either alphabet or law. He spoke in anger, as if put out at being forced to use ordinary English words. "The case is this," said he; "I will speak in monosyllables if I can, Miss Thursley—if I can. The case is this. Mrs Thursley took two £50 shares in a bank where the liability was unlimited. Her whole fortune therefore became liable in case the bank broke. It did break. Do you understand me, Miss Thursley?—the bank broke. I hope I make my meaning sufficiently clear. It is rather plain English when banks take to breaking: Miss Thursley, they make their meaning pretty clear, I can tell you. It is not so difficult to understand you are a pauper when your whole fortune is gone. But in this case the entire fortune did not go. There being many rich shareholders who could pay up, the whole fortune did not go in this case,—Mrs Thursley only became liable to the extent of £12,000."

"Only £12,000," I cried; "only £12,000! Why, that is

ruin ! I am half ruined, Mr Jones ! And I must sell the house I am so fond of, where my mother and I lived together and were happy."

Mr Jones stood before me. He put his left hand into his waistcoat, and stretching out his right arm he exclaimed, with a theatrical gesture, "The money is paid, Miss Thursley—the money is paid!"

"Paid ! How was it paid ? Who paid it ?"

"Your uncle."

"My uncle ?"

"Your uncle—Mr Sherbrook of Sherbrook Hall."

"I cannot understand you," said I. The poor man let fall his two hands, and stared at me in mute astonishment. I hoped he would again repeat what he had said, and I was annoyed when he did not speak. "You are silent, Mr Jones, so I do not believe my ears. I cannot believe what is impossible. Why," I asked—"why should my uncle do this thing when he is not a generous man ?"

At last Mr Jones exclaimed : "Cannot you comprehend, Miss Thursley ? It surely cannot be impossible for you to comprehend, Miss Thursley, that your uncle, Mr Sherbrook, paid the £12,000 in order that none of your property, and not even your house, might be sold."

"But why—why did he do so ? What did he say ?"

"Lord bless me, Miss Thursley !—why, he said he would not let any of your property be sold, as it was rising in value ; and as to that small house of yours in London, why, he said you would be sorry if it were sold. He said you were fond of your home."

"How did he know it ? How could a man like Uncle Sherbrook know, Mr Jones," I asked, "that I am fond of that house ? He never heard me say so."

"Lord bless me !" again exclaimed the attorney, "what questions ladies do ask. Lord bless me ! but they do ask questions !"

I was altogether lost in wonder. After sitting silent for some minutes, I remember thinking I would go away ; so I shook hands with Mr Jones and said, "When I have thanked my uncle, we will consider, Mr Jones, how I can repay this money."

The attorney stood in the doorway, and delivered himself of the following speech with such an air of superiority to the rest of mankind, that I could not help thinking I was in some way under an obligation to him as well as to my uncle. "Mr Sherbrook," said he,—"Mr Sherbrook will never permit you

to repay this money. Mr Sherbrook rarely gives, Miss Thursley; but when he does, he gives from principle—from principle! Mr Sherbrook thinks he persuaded Mrs Thursley to take shares in this bank: it is true he did persuade her to invest in this concern, being so advised by Mr Boggle. Mr Sherbrook has peculiar ideas of honour—ideas which are not shared by the majority of my clients. Mr Sherbrook was not bound in law to do what he has done, but he thought himself bound in honour; therefore he has acted generously from a high sense of honour and duty, and from a feeling of kindness. He will never change or take back what he has given. Should you propose to repay this money, you will insult him—Mr Sherbrook will feel insulted: I say it who should know him after fourteen years of professional intercourse—an intercourse which certain persons have interrupted for a time—for a time. Miss Thursley, I was your uncle's confidential man of business for fourteen years. My last interview with Mr Sherbrook convinced me he would again become my client,—my most esteemed client,—if he dared, if he dared. However, no more of this. Mr Sherbrook, when not the victim of intrigue, when not prejudiced by others, is a man of sound judgment; he is, moreover, a man of honour. Mr Sherbrook is an honourable man. Mr Sherbrook did not desire you to know what he has done; he merely wished me to tell you that, for the present, you had no ready money. But I have thought it my duty to tell you the truth: yes, madam, I have told you because it is my duty towards Mr Sherbrook,—it is my duty to my late esteemed client to tell you how he has acted in this matter—how nobly, how honourably he has acted. Mr Sherbrook is a man of honour. As long as Mr Sherbrook has his wits about him, Miss Thursley, that Boggle will find it difficult to persuade him to do a mean action."

The tone of voice in which the one attorney and land-agent mentioned the other attorney and land-agent, caught my ear, and I suddenly remembered that an important point of law on which Mr Boggle had given his opinion lay forgotten in my pocket.

I gave Mr Jones Uncle Sherbrook's letter. He betrayed intense satisfaction on receiving it, and read it with ill-concealed delight.

Mr Jones spent at least twenty minutes in scratching elaborate flourishes for Uncle Sherbrook's edification, and I certainly thought the legal composition looked worth 13s. 6d. I rose to leave.

"In a moment, Miss Thursley, in a moment!" said Mr Jones; "I fear I must detain you until I have sealed this letter. It is a private, it is a privileged communication between my late esteemed client and his old friend and confidential adviser. It may perhaps be somewhat contrary to the rules of professional etiquette, as it undoubtedly is beneath my dignity, to give an opinion on a case which is in the hands of another solicitor. I do so entirely, entirely, in consideration of the unbroken professional intercourse which existed for fourteen years between Mr Sherbrook and myself. Pray excuse me, excuse me, Miss Thursley. It is not the easy matter you may imagine properly to affix a seal exactly in the middle of the sealing-wax."

Uncle Sherbrook could not have sealed a letter with greater solemnity.

This ceremony at an end, I bowed myself out of the room, and Mr Jones bowed me out of the house, through the little strip of garden into the carriage. After I had started, I looked back and saw Mr Jones standing on the county road, rolling his hands together, and bowing still.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Thomas told Snipkins, Snipkins told Aunt Jane, that I had been to see Mr Jones.

Mr Boggle, passing through Harefield, had seen the Sherbrook carriage waiting at Mr Jones's door. Mr Boggle had complained of this crying scandal to Aunt Jane, and my aunt had told him it was not her fault but Sophy's. "And, Sophy, Mr Boggle was very, very angry with you, and indeed he was so angry, I was quite frightened, for I was afraid he would be angry with me. And Mr Boggle said he would never forgive you, Sophy—and I am sure he won't; and I think he is quite right, because you have insulted him by consulting a man like Mr Jones." Aunt Jane was very indignant at the insult I had offered Mr Boggle.

Uncle Sherbrook said, "Jane, what is done cannot be undone." These impressive words, and the seriousness of my uncle's manner, overawed my aunt for the time being, but afterwards she only talked on this subject the more. Uncle

Sherbrook did not walk with us on the front avenue for several afternoons, so Aunt Jane's anger flowed unchecked.

I said "Indeed," from time to time, but only just listened sufficiently to discover that my aunt knew nothing of the true state of my affairs. It was evident the £12,000 had not been mentioned to her. I thought perhaps Uncle Sherbrook did not wish Mr Boggle to know what he and Mr Jones had done; and what Aunt Jane knew, Mr Boggle would surely learn to know. Or else, I thought, it might be that some delicate instinct hidden away with other fine feelings in my uncle's silent heart, made him dread the publicity his wife would give his generosity, and revealed to him that she would harp aloud upon this good action, as if it were a cook or the bonnet of a Christian, while Snipkins would say *Amen*, and a great deal besides.

Uncle Sherbrook avoided me. I imagined he was afraid I might give him Mr Jones's letter in my aunt's presence.

Five whole days passed before I had an opportunity of speaking to my uncle. Aunt Jane was in so many places at once, and in the study at all times! She let out to me that Snipkins had told her I was "getting round" Uncle Sherbrook, and would soon undermine the wife's rightful influence, and Mr Boggle's also.

At last, by good luck, Aunt Jane's crape flounce caught in the handle of a door. Her "deepest" crape flounce! It was torn to ribbons. I saw the accident, but as my aunt did not see me, I fled rejoicing, and left her to scream alone for Snipkins.

I ran to the study, and went in with a breeze which sent a blue-bugle flying across the room.

Startled solemnity was on every feature of Uncle Sherbrook's face; his astonished eyes followed the blue-bugle.

"Uncle Sherbrook," I said, taking his hand and clasping it in my two hands, "you have been nobly generous to me." My uncle was silent. "Thank you for your unspoken kindness, Uncle Sherbrook. Twelve thousand pounds is a large sum to give, and to give in silence." He did not speak. "Speak!" I implored, "speak! or I cannot thank you as I wish."

I expected at least to see some expression in his face which would tell me he knew what I meant. Could I have mistaken Mr Jones? And yet my uncle left his hand in mine, and did not try to take it from me or motion me away, or even tell me to shut the door I had left open.

His silence had its usual paralysing effect on my tongue. I found it hard to speak again.

At length Uncle Sherbrook spoke. "Sophy," he said, "you are inaccurate. Inaccuracy is the besetting sin of a woman's mind."

What a queer beginning! thought I.

"Sophy," continued my uncle, "in the matter I presume you refer to, I did not consider my liabilities extended beyond £11,900. I considered it just and proper that your mother and her heir or heirs should be liable to the extent of the sum invested."

At these words all doubt disappeared from my mind; I believed what the attorney had told me. The paltry sum withheld by the outstretched hand was the sign by which I knew my uncle's generosity was no myth, but a real fact. It was like that little cock to the nose which some men and women have, but angels have not. I felt it had cost my uncle an effort to give this money; I felt this, so I admired him,—I admired him more than if he had acted from mere impulse.

Much moved by his great kindness, and still holding his hand, I said, "Uncle Sherbrook, you have indeed been like a father to me, so I will be like a daughter to you."

When I said this, my uncle bent forward and gravely kissed me—for the second time in my life. There was silence between us.

When Uncle Sherbrook spoke again, he said, and rather testily, "Sophy, shut the door. Pick up Mr Boggle's letter, and replace it on my desk."

I obeyed his commands. My uncle pointed to a chair opposite his own, and telling me to sit down, asked me if Mr Jones had not given me a letter for him? I gave my uncle the attorney's sealed envelope, and rose to leave. To my surprise, I was requested to remain seated.

Uncle Sherbrook examined the unopened letter. "Yes, this is Jones's writing," he said; "I know it well." He then repeated what he had said to me the other day. "Whatever Jones's shortcomings may have been, I cannot forget that he and I fought and won our great case together."

Being willing to please him, I said, "Indeed, Uncle Sherbrook, that was an important case, for it seems to have settled the knottiest point of law ever disputed by landlord and tenant."

"Sophy," remarked my uncle, "it was not a point of law which merely concerned a landlord and a tenant. The dispute was one likely to arise between every landowner in the United Kingdom and every peasant (not necessarily a tenant of the

landowner's), and every vagabond, gipsy, wayfarer, farmer, shopkeeper, or proprietor, not necessarily neighbours of the landowner's, although more probably neighbours than strangers residing at a distance. If neighbours and also tenants (as in my case), the trespass would in all likelihood be more frequent, and the nuisance would consequently be the greater; but the point at issue would remain the same in either case. It was a simple question of right-of-way."

"Oh, but Uncle Sherbrook," I cried, "how could it have been a simple one, when the whole United Kingdom was at law? Landlords, landowners, tenants, and peasants not necessarily tenants, wayfarers, shopkeepers, farmers, and neighbours, and proprietors not necessarily neighbours of the landowner's, and even the very vagabonds and gipsies, all fighting at the same time! Why, it was the most complicated case I ever heard of."

"Sophy," said my uncle, "you are not altogether deficient in mental capacity. I have known ladies more deficient than you; you should, therefore, be able to apprehend the fact that in a case where there are many and various interests at stake, there yet may only be one point at issue."

Uncle Sherbrook opened Mr Jones's letter. I got up to go away, and again my uncle bade me stay. He read the letter slowly, and having read it once, began to read it a second time. I got up. "Sit down, Sophy!" he exclaimed angrily; "you distract my attention, so that I do not grasp the point of Jones's argument."

And Uncle Sherbrook read the letter a third time. He then took up the blue-bugle I had placed on his desk, and read that too.

I was growing desperate.

At length my uncle stopped reading. He leant back in his arm-chair, crossed his legs, and held up Mr Jones's letter in his right hand and Mr Buggle's in his left. He looked from one legal document to the other; then he looked at me, and with such an air of serious preoccupation, that I almost thought he must be going to pass sentence of death upon me in accordance with the well-considered advice of Jones and Buggle. But really had my uncle condemned me to be hung by the neck till I was dead, I do not think I should have been much more astonished than I was to hear him say what he did. This was the speech he made me: "Sophy, I have consulted Jones and Buggle on a matter of importance. Buggle gave me his advice,"—he looked at his left hand—"Jones has giyen me his,"

—he looked at his right one—“and yet it is a strange fact that their advice is diametrically opposed on every point at issue. They only agree in each one advising me to take a first-rate London opinion, but Jones recommends one barrister and Boggle another.” And now came the astounding part of my uncle’s oration: “Sophy, I purpose reading you Jones’s letter, and I will also read you Boggle’s. You will then tell me in what light the matter strikes you, for the opinion of a perfectly ignorant person is not always to be despised. Listen to me attentively, and carefully separate in your own mind the more important from the less important points. Not that I would have you imagine,” he added gravely, “that any point is unimportant.”

I hardly knew how to keep from smiling. The idea of my being asked to sit in judgment on Jones and Boggle! I was amused, but I soon got dreadfully bored. However, I did not yawn; I listened patiently, thinking perhaps I could never find a better way of pleasing Uncle Sherbrook and of showing him my gratitude.

Having read Mr Boggle’s letter aloud, my uncle gave a lengthy disquisition on the real “points at issue.” Finally he said, “Sophy, you are mistress of the facts. It may now be well for you to hear and to consider the advice—the contradictory advice—given me by Jones.”

Uncle Sherbrook had read half through Mr Jones’s letter, when the door opened; and with all the majesty of an injured woman, in walked Aunt Jane—and her upper lip!

My aunt turned an angry, jealous eye upon me. I understood her look. Stifling a yawn, I smiled to think any one could envy me the privilege of being infinitely bored.

Uncle Sherbrook’s nervousness surprised me. He thrust Mr Jones’s letter into his desk, and then trying to lock the desk, turned the key round and round. He signed to me to go away. I slipped behind Aunt Jane. Her lips were open; the gold was pouring out. I shut the door hurriedly, for fear I should hear what she was saying, and find she wanted me to stay. Then I ran as if for my life.

Aunt Jane did not speak to me for many days. Her silence would have been a comfort had she not sighed perpetually, and groaned and wept.

When at length Aunt Jane spoke again, I discovered, to my amazement, that she had good reason to be jealous of me, for Uncle Sherbrook had praised my common-sense and legal acumen. Doubtless my uncle was unaware I had only listened

while he had spoken, and remembering many wise things were said, forgot he himself had said them.

Aunt Jane could make Uncle Sherbrook feel uncomfortable when she was jealous, so that her jealousy, though trying to me in many ways, was not an unmixed evil, as it preserved me from frequent visits to the study. I have no taste for the law. Had I given my uncle the slightest encouragement, he would have consulted me frequently. If ever I was alone with him for a minute, he fumbled in his pocket, and told me I was not entirely deficient in mental capacity. "But Aunt Jane would not like it," I would say, answering his meaning and not his words. I would hear the crumpling of a paper, and Uncle Sherbrook would take his hand out of his pocket, and say no more.

I allowed Uncle Sherbrook to manage my affairs. I told him he might do what he liked with my money; that I would trust him implicitly, and never ask a question. I knew nothing I could do or say would please him more. He said this proof of my confidence gave him great satisfaction, and thenceforth he saw Mr Jones every Monday, and, for all I know, he may have written to him besides. He visited "Sophy's confidential man of business" openly and in state, and for one day in the week seemed to forget the bay mare was a roarer.

From this time my uncle's lower jaw grew permanently shorter than it used to be. The fact is, he was leading a gay life—a life gay with the one sort of gaiety he cared for. He was dancing backwards and forwards from Boggle to Jones, and from Jones to Boggle, and from my property to his property. He became so lively (for him) that I should have thought he was making another will, only Aunt Jane lived more out of the study than in it; and she hardly ever left the sacred room while Uncle Sherbrook made his will. He had taught her to enjoy the importance and secrecy of such a delectable solemnity; and besides, it was an event.

My aunt and I were consequently thrown together more than ever. Aunt Jane expected me to lead exactly the life she led herself, and to do nothing on earth, almost to think nothing, but what she did and thought herself. Oh, the loneliness of living morning, noon, and night with a person who has no originality, who bores you, and is no companion to you! There are two kinds of solitude. They are both sad; but I found the worst, a thousand times the worst, is not to be alone by yourself, but alone with another person. Oh, the wretchedness of being imprisoned in one narrow round of small thoughts and

petty worries, like some young fleet hound chained by a wearying collar to one hole in a wall ! The desolation of living without new ideas ! Those only who have never felt the pain of starvation can wonder others are driven to despair by hunger. There is many a woman, I am sure, imprisoned in some one else's narrow life, as I was in Aunt Jane's, who suffers from the wasted powers of her own young life, as from a disease slowly driving her to despair by hunger of the heart and mind. But it would seem a woman's life is not her own. When she gives it up to others, she gets no thanks for the gift. Aunt Jane had greedily taken possession of my life, yet she gave me no thanks in return. If she had stolen my mother's diamond ring from my finger, she would have thought she had committed a sin. As if I loved a ring with all my soul ! But she could steal my time, my mind, my very life from me, and never know remorse. Her vacant mind lived on the mind of others. My mind was hers—my life ! It is cruel, it is maddening to be robbed of life, and to feel that time is passing like a wave which leaves no mark upon the sand.

I seemed to have lived years since my mother's death ; I had lost all clear consciousness of time. There were days when I thought I could no longer force myself to stay on at Sherbrook Hall,—when I hated Aunt Jane, and felt as if she were setting me mad. Mad ? The idea filled me with horror ; I turned from it, and dared not dwell upon it, for it seemed so likely that I might indeed go mad. I hated Sherbrook. Although my uncle was kind to me, his affection was not one that warmed the heart and satisfied it, and I was never quite at ease with him. I hated the whole place, and the front avenue, and the back one even worse than the front. I dreaded the tedious evening, and the long ceremony of dinner, lengthened expressly for the training of Thomas ! I hated the very bells in the house, and the irritating needless punctuality, and the solemnity all about nothing, and the minute particularity, and the Commentary. I thought I could live with people's faults if Heaven preserved me from their best virtues, for they are proud of their irritating virtues, and do not hide them like their faults. It was the Sherbrooks' narrow virtues I found so teasing.

But when this hatred of Sherbrook Hall, and of the life I led there, would passionately seize me, my conscience would give me pain, for I well knew there was only one way in which I could make Uncle Sherbrook feel I was grateful to him. If I went away from his house, and left him to spend his evenings

alone with Aunt Jane, or to be tatted at by the admirable Catherine, he would surely feel I had paid him with an empty speech, and not with a daughter's gratitude.

Hitherto I had thought I had a very grateful heart, and in this I think I was like most people; for, whereas I have noticed few believe in the gratitude of others, I have not heard any one call himself ungrateful. I detested ingratitude in other people, and used to be quite sure, if any one ever did me a kindness, I should take a lively pleasure in making that person feel I thanked him. And yet it was I who now found gratitude a hard bondage!

Let no one be deceived; it is not always easy to be grateful. Because, if we would satisfy our conscience and our heart, we must not coldly reason, or only choose the pleasant open paths of easy gratitude. We must rather follow our instinct, like the noble dog, who never forsakes a friend, but leaps with joy upon the pompous bore, upon the wretched, the sinful, the poor—or, far worse, the vulgar—man. I was grieved to find it is not easy to be grateful, unless we can be so in our own way; and I changed my opinion of my own heart, and no longer thought it naturally a grateful one.

At last, after many struggles and many yawns, I did settle I would live on at Sherbrook Hall with my aunt and uncle just for the present. I could not bear to think I should live there long. It was not reason or sense told me to stay, but instinct which persuaded my heart against its will. I felt I was only doing my duty to the old people by remaining with them, and I knew I should be very selfish if I went away.

I will allow there is a certain satisfaction in doing your duty; only, unfortunately, it does not prevent your being infinitely bored. I wish it did! There were times when I would have patience with Aunt Jane: I would have pity, and then my feelings towards her were not unkind. At heart I had the sort of affection for her we have for those who have corrected us incessantly in childhood, and bored us from our earliest youth. It is a very peculiar kind of affection, and yet perhaps it is one after all.

But there was a thought which would come to me in the dulness and aching void of my life, and be the best, the only real comforter I ever had. "There is death," I would think, "awaiting each one of us; and he is not so far off, after all. I may yawn a little now, but I know he is there. If I just lift up my eyes and look beyond the present tediousness, I can see him. And I am glad to see him, for my beloved stands by his

side. I might be sorry to think of dying if I were very cheerful here, laughing with some kindly witty fellow, and satisfied with life. This present time is short to pass without our merry joke, and we who are condemned to die should not care so much to laugh ; it is better for us to think a little while we have time." So I did think ; and such thoughts take the fidgets from impatience, and calm discontent. And they have a sort of joy of their own ; but it is not a lively, laughing, arguing one.

While brooding in this way, I would forget to smile at the little things which used to make a laughing mocker of me in my uncle's house. I did not care to "argue" with Aunt Jane, but just said "Indeed !" and little more.

My aunt thought me a wonderfully improved character, and considered "Sophy's regeneration" was entirely due to the Commentary. She actually said to me one morning, on the back avenue, "I declare, Sophy, you are becoming quite an amiable person." This was the first compliment Aunt Jane had ever paid me, but it did not turn my head. I knew that in a nature like mine striking amiability is merely the effect of low spirits. It pleased Aunt Jane to think she and Dr MacShaw had killed the "old Adam" within me. So they had. But oh, that old Adam ! at least he was lively !

CHAPTER XIX.

The measles had no sooner begun to disappear from the Rectory than the whooping-cough took possession of that unlucky household. I should have liked to go and see poor Mary Sherbrook, and help her to nurse that pack of sick children ; but when I proposed it to Aunt Jane, I thought she would get both measles and whooping-cough from sheer fright, since they were in the air.

I myself should not have minded getting the whooping-cough —it would have been something to do ; and whenever I heard Aunt Jane or Snipkins coming near me, I might have whooped and sent them ambling in the opposite direction. I should have whooped for at least three months.

Except Mary and the Rector, we had no kind friendly neighbours. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were unfortunately our nearest ones, and they were not friendly people. We had seen

nothing of them since my mother's death. It is true I had received a letter of condolence from Denis at the time. I have it still. This was it :—

“ DUMBLEDORE, 10th Sept.

“ DEAR SOPHY,—You are, I believe, aware that I managed to attend your mother's funeral, although I did not hear of the loss you had sustained before the Tuesday after my aunt's death. I was pre-engaged to shoot Castletower's woods with the Prince and Furley, but Castletower, at great inconvenience to himself, most kindly made arrangements for me to catch the early train, so that I was enabled to be present at the ceremony. I need hardly say it gave me much pleasure to pay this tribute of respect to the memory of one for whom I must ever entertain feelings of affection.

“ Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is out driving with the Duchess, or, I feel sure, would send her kind regards. Pray give mine to the Sherbrooks, and believe me, very truly yours,

“ RIGARDY-WRENSTONE.”

To this letter, with the peer's signature, I had replied :—

“ DEAR RIGARDY-WRENSTONE,—I am sorry you did not shoot with the Prince of Wales and Lord Furley, and I regret that Lord Castletower was put to inconvenience, for I fear the dead do not care who goes to their funeral, or who stays away and shoots. I rather imagine it is the remembrance of affection and gratitude shown to them while still they were living, which they carry beyond the grave.

“ Should Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone have returned from her drive with the Duchess, pray give her my kind regards.—Believe me, yours truly,

SOPHY THURSLEY.”

The Rigardys spent the month of February at the Abbey. We used to meet them at church, but they were so occupied entertaining the Dumbledores, Castletowers, Furleys, and Tuttertons, that they never came to see us. Denis followed Lady Offaway's example, and thought it fashionable not to patronise the “Aborigines.”

Our only other near neighbours were the Tankneys. Tank Court is barely three miles from Sherbrook Hall, so it was a sad pity that “queer people” lived there. When ladies said Lord Tankney was “not a very nice man,” they meant he was a very wicked one. He had been a bad husband in his younger days.

His wife had been obliged to separate from him ; and, since her death, he had married the opera-singer who was the cause of the quarrel. Lord Tankney's only son, though said by some people to be heir to the fortune, cannot inherit the title.

The whole county had taken the former Lady Tankney's part. Pretty Clara Moultrie had been a popular Dullshire beauty once upon a time, before she married Lord Tankney. She continued to be popular while mistress of Tank Court. When Lady Tankney was forced to leave her husband's house, it was said in the county, "No one goes to Tank Court," yet the house was never known to be empty. The constant visitors were said to come down from London. Wherever they came from, they arrived in numbers. Harefield often had the excitement of seeing three coroneted waggonettes, full of gay ladies or actresses and gentlemen, on their way to his "Lordship's." And what a rate they went at ! As a child, when I asked questions about these delightfully dashing waggonettes, I got evasive answers from my mother, and scandalised looks, but no words, from Aunt Jane. My aunt's miraculous silence was in itself an awful mystery ! So I grew up to think Lord Tankney's waggonettes were driving post-haste to the infernal regions. I remember their rushing past us one day while Robert was walking our horses up the Simplon. I declare, thought I, I should like to go to hell, if only I went there full gallop ! I well recollect thinking this. I teased Aunt Jane with many questions. She put on her most severe air of propriety, and bade me be quiet ; then she pulled down the upper lip, and kept her mouth tightly closed, for fear a word might slip out unawares. She eased her over-burdened powers by heaving deep sighs. Tank Court was the only subject on which I ever knew Aunt Jane prevail with her tongue to keep silence. The wickedness of such a household struck my good aunt dumb. Later in life, when I knew what injury it was Lord Tankney had done his poor wife, I liked my aunt all the better for her hatred of this man's sin. The one point I admired in the two Sherbrooks was their clear idea of right and wrong. They might think things wicked that were not very wrong, but they never thought what was wrong was right.

Uncle Sherbrook had deep reverence for the holiness of married life. Lord Tankney's conduct outraged this feeling, and offended his pride : he considered the bad life led by the largest landed proprietor in West Dullshire lessened the respect the "masses" should feel for all great landowners.

Then, too, my uncle had been one of pretty Clara Moultrie's

admirers, and had danced with her at two county balls before he went into the Church. Fancy Uncle Sherbrook dancing ! I asked him if it could be true he had ever danced ? He reddened, and said Yes. What strangely different human beings the two Sherbrooks must have been before they grew old and became "awakened" !

My uncle sat on the bench beside Lord Tankney for twenty years, and, I believe, never spoke to him. When business required the neighbours to speak, I am told they spoke to Jack Jones. Denis used to say they had old Jack put into the commission of the peace for that very purpose. My cousin loved to declare Lord Tankney did not care a straw whether Uncle Sherbrook cut him or not ; but my uncle firmly believed he did care.

Lord Tankney is the only very great county magnate who spends six months of the year in Dullshire. Lord Offaway, "the Marquis," as he is called, has a place in Scotland, and a hunting-box in Leicestershire. The Marchioness rides well to hounds, though she is not as young as she used to be. Lady Offaway is positively obliged to go to Cowes every summer, as she cannot exist without six weeks yachting after the London season. When the shooting is over in Scotland, the Offaways spend a month at Manyfields. They also come there in the spring on their way to town, if not engaged in visiting elsewhere. Lord Offaway is supposed to like Dullshire, as his father did before him ; but my lady has been heard to exclaim more than once in the presence of "county people," that Manyfields may be well enough in its way, but that positively the neighbourhood is quite too more than awful ! for there is not a soul one would care to speak to ! now positively there is not !

So the house which fifteen years ago entertained the gentry for miles around, is filled with "people one meets in town." If the "Aborigines" are asked to dine, it is said they are not introduced to the party staying in the house, unless they happen to be amusing Aborigines, "quite too more than original." They are then introduced to be laughed at.

Uncle Sherbrook used to be very intimate with the "late man," as the last dead marquis is termed

Some years ago my uncle and Aunt Jane were invited to dine at Manyfields. The bay mare had not then become a roarer, and the Sherbrooks were younger, so they undertook the ten miles' drive. Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup, Lady Offaway's tame cat, was specially introduced to Uncle Sher-

brook by my lady—perhaps she considered her elderly guest “quite too more than original.” I never could make out what really took place. Aunt Jane cannot tell a clear story. You must know the facts before she begins her tale, to understand or even to remember them afterwards. All I can say is, that Uncle Sherbrook never went to Manyfields again, and refused several invitations to go there.

The year before I went to live at Sherbrook Hall, Lord Flashdash, the Offaways’ eldest son, came of age, and stood for the county. He was ignominiously defeated by Mr Frank Moultrie, Sir John’s eldest son. The Moultries are hospitable people at all times ; besides, they fill their house for the county ball, and give a ball themselves during the “hunt week.”

Each year the Moultries invited the Sherbrooks to spend three days of this “hunt week” at the Grange. My uncle and aunt considered it a compliment to be invited, and Aunt Jane would, I am sure, have felt aggrieved had she been forgotten. Yet for some years the Sherbrooks had annually refused the invitation ; and solely because they happened to have fallen out of the habit of going anywhere, or of putting themselves out in any way for the sake of society. They were people who would have liked society to come to them, if it came easily, without any trouble ; but who never sought society, or cared to drive those precious horses visiting beyond Vottingham.

Uncle Sherbrook would meet the county gentlemen when he went in to Vottingham on business, and at election dinners, and on the grand jury ; but this was only now and then. He rarely met any one on the magisterial bench but Lord Tankney, to whom he did not speak, or else Rigardy-Wrenstone. I used often to think it was a pity my uncle had been a clergyman in the days of his youth, before his elder brother died, as for ever after, having sound views, he thought it was wrong for him to hunt or shoot. His white neckcloth, in keeping him from the hunting-field, cast him out of the ideas and familiar society of other gentlemen. So every year he lived more and more shut up with his own peculiarities and Aunt Jane’s. The Snipkins family became unaccustomed to see people invited to dine and sleep.

The year of my mother’s death, Aunt Jane refused the Moultries annual invitation on the blackest-edged paper.

Some months afterwards, Lady Moultrie, kindly saying a little change must be good for me, invited me to spend a few days at the Grange. I was not told of this invitation until Aunt Jane had refused it. My aunt said I was still in deep mourning ;

besides, she told me she did not approve of too much gaiety for young people. She thought it better they should lead a quiet life—the sort of life she imagined herself to have led at my age. Now I know she visited about, and danced, and even went to theatres in her youth; but she had forgotten it these thirty years! Old people do forget their youth, and there is no miracle like this one! Aunt Jane said if I went to the Moultries, perhaps the young people might insist on dancing in the evening while I was there—"for I know Lady Moultrie lets her sons and daughters do what they like, and one of the sons is a flirting officer; but Edward will not hear a word against any member of that family, and he is always meeting Sir John on the grand jury, and I declare Edward dotes upon him, and I almost think he really must have been slightly in love long ago with his sister Clara, before she married Lord Tankney. It is quite ridiculous; and Snipkins says if the Moultries lived nearer, we should never have Sir John out of the house."

Aunt Jane being "awakened," and past sixty, perfectly agreed with the author of 'Captain Apollyon,' and was persuaded flirting officers and frivolous young ladies *danced downwards*. My aunt also considered half the silly matches between "young people who did not know their own minds" would never take place if there were no parties in country houses and no dancing. Perhaps not. Sensible marriages undoubtedly come from flirting over commentaries in after-life. A lady cannot make a sensible match like Aunt Jane's till she is thirty-nine; and no truly Christian gentleman is infallible, or has a confirmed liver complaint, before he is forty.

I had not lived long at Sherbrook Hall before I put away my youth, like a fine dress I should never wear again. If I hoped visitors might come, it was merely because I thought they would listen to Aunt Jane, and give her new ideas and new grievances, and be themselves a new subject to talk of. It was very difficult to amuse Aunt Jane. I could do little to please her but say "Indeed!" and wonder six times a-day if Catherine would stay away for ever, and if Gordon-Sherbrook's lung was really any better!

This young man's lung became a fertile field of wonder to my aunt. The best of women was also the best of mothers. The letters in which she expressed her maternal feelings were Scriptural compositions, which edified my aunt and puzzled her at the same time. The dear, excellent, indefatigable creature "rejoiced in the Lord," and was delighted to say her precious Gordon-Sherbrook never felt better in his life. It was no longer

his health which kept her away from Riverbank ; she would return that very hour if she could find it in her heart to leave the good work she was now engaged in. She had collected £40, 6s. 3½d. for the Promotion of the Blessed Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen, and must collect £15 more.

"Or there would be nothing left for the charity," I remarked.

"Sophy, you don't seem to understand what Catherine means!" exclaimed my aunt ; "but I daresay you were not really listening." So Aunt Jane read me out the whole of Catherine's letter again.

"How comes Mrs Stewart," I asked, "to be 'rejoicing in the Lord,' as she terms it, over her son's recovery, when Dr Daly tells Uncle Sherbrook the young man is spitting blood, and never can be strong again?"

Here indeed was a mystery ! a mine of interminable wonderings ! Aunt Jane wrote to Mrs Stewart, and again received the same excellent account of Gordon-Sherbrook's health.

Surely there cannot be two sides to a lung ?

I grew so dead sick of Gordon-Sherbrook's lung, that I was quite glad when at Easter Rigardy-Wrenstone's head groom, Ned Sparks, told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, that "his people" were at the Abbey, and had no company staying in the house. I hoped they would come and see Aunt Jane, and drive Gordon-Sherbrook's lung out of her mind. My aunt expected a visit from her only brother's only son,—if not from him, certainly from his wife. Every day for a whole week, I could see she looked forward to this event (because it would be an event) with pleasure, and a black-bordered handkerchief. However, the Rigardy-Wrenstones did not go to the trouble of calling. My aunt could hardly believe her ears when she heard they had gone back to town ; but she had to believe at last, for the news came to us on the best authority—it was again Ned Sparks who told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane.

Ned Sparks's veracity was moreover confirmed by the 'Morning Post.' My aunt never failed to read the names of the people who went to the drawing-rooms and levees. Such literature was certainly not of an atheistical tendency. Aunt Jane did not merely lay these lists upon her knee and go to sleep, she really read them. She was pleased when she recognised acquaintances, and would read out their names, and tell me who they were and whom they had married, and whom their sons had married, and if their daughters were strictly brought up, and whom these girls

were to have married and did not marry, and to whom they were married in the end. All this valuable information was doubtless interesting, but might have been more so had I ever seen the people who married and did not marry in such hopeless confusion. One morning there was a levee-list in the 'Post,' and really I thought breakfast would never end. Aunt Jane had been intermarrying a whole set of names for nearly an hour, when of a sudden she stopped ; so I said "Indeed!" But she did not go on again. I looked at her to see if anything was the matter, and found her gazing at me with an air of mingled disappointment and anger. I said "Indeed!" a second time, fearing she might think me a careless audience.

"Well, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt—"well, I do declare you were paying no attention whatever to me. The Rigardy-Wrenstones have really gone to town, and without calling here!—for Denis was at the levee, and I have read out his name twice over to you, and I expected you would be astonished, but you were not!"

I took the 'Morning Post,' but made no apology, fearing my aunt would cry if I confessed that I had not been listening to her. At first I could not see my cousin's name anywhere ; then I found I had looked for it instinctively amongst the dukes and marquesses. So I cast down my eye to the "Messieurs," and there it was ! but put in like the name of a conceited Scotchman, who fears the world will never know he has a country place. I found *Rigardy-Wrenstone (Harefield Abbey)*. "Yes, that is he," said I ; "and he has certainly put this in himself. So the Rigardy-Wrenstones must be in town, Aunt Jane." Here, indeed, was conclusive evidence on a very important point. Oh, the important events of life, how important they are !

Towards the end of July, Ned Sparks again told Robert Jones, who told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, the Rigardy-Wrenstones had arrived at the Abbey.

Not very long afterwards my cousin's wife paid us a visit.

"How do you do, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?" said Aunt Jane, rising, handkerchief in hand, to meet the visitor who had just been announced. "I hope you are quite well."

"Thankee!" answered Jumping Georgy, and astonished my aunt by kissing her instead of waiting to be kissed,—as if she, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, were a greater lady than Aunt Jane. She had jumped brusquely into the room ; she now remained standing still, with her eye-glass fixed in her eye.

"It is some time since we met," remarked Aunt Jane in a

weeping voice. "Time and life and death move onwards, and man is but a flower of the field."

There came no reply to this broad hint. What could Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone be thinking of, not to perceive my aunt longed for a few words of melancholy and condolence? I rejoiced at her blindness.

"Will you take a chair, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?" said I; and I shook hands with her, for she had forgotten to shake hands with me.

"Thankee!" she said, and seated herself suddenly, almost alarmingly, for you feared the chair might break.

There was silence.

"I hope my nephew is well?" asked Aunt Jane.

"Yes, thankee," said her niece.

Then came another dead stop.

There was something about the Drill-sergeant which, on first meeting her and her eye-glass, shortened Aunt Jane's breath, and took away her wonderful power of easy transition. I actually felt called upon to make a remark.

"I wonder if we shall have another open winter this year as we had last?" (No answer.) "It was exactly the weather for hunting." (No answer.) "I suppose there were some capital runs?" (No answer.) "You are fond of riding, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, are you not?"

"I like it," said she.

When I drew forth these three words, I felt like a dentist who has extracted three teeth, and I thought I would rest a little before the next operation. Aunt Jane, seeing my success, began to speak. Her own voice reassured her. Having made a good start, she talked on. Once off, her tongue can turn on its own axis. I imagine my aunt did not long perceive that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone remained silent.

Though Jumping Georgy had not a word to say herself, she soon grew tired of my aunt's conversation. Being a dashing light dragoon, and by no means one of those well-trained pieces of heavy cavalry who can sit silent for hours in uncomplaining majesty, she took no trouble to conceal her feelings. She raised her eye-glass, looked at everything in the room, then jumped up suddenly, and declared she must be off. Aunt Jane was startled, and, losing the thread of her discourse, found herself without a word.

I felt rested by this time, so I asked Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone if I should inquire for her carriage. "Thankee," said she, and I did so.

There was silence once more.

I stared out of the window, and was glad to see a black cloud, for it suggested a remark. I said, "It looks like rain. Can I lend you a cloak, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?"

"Thankee! no," said she; "don't mind the rain."

Thomas announced the carriage just as my aunt began again to recover the use of her tongue. "Good-bye!" said Aunt Jane. "Pray give my kind regards to Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone."

"Thankee!" replied my cousin's wife. She winced a little, for Aunt Jane's upper lip had laid marked emphasis on "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone." Jumping Georgy left the room in a greater hurry than she had entered it.

My aunt liked to discuss this visit every day for a week, in the morning on the back avenue, and in the afternoon on the front one.

I only said, "Indeed!" What else could I say on such a sterile subject, except to remark that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone made great use of the word "Thankee," and very little use of any other?

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's short manner hurt Aunt Jane. Her clean-cut *Thankees!* were a sharp instrument, killing illusion like cold steel, and thrusting back into your heart all hope of soft friendship and sympathy.

Still who can believe it? Aunt Jane had so few people to visit, that she was quite in a fuss to call at the Abbey. Uncle Sherbrook said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had taken her time to call on Aunt Jane, so that Aunt Jane might call on Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone at her leisure. My uncle always ordered the carriage: this was his prerogative. He and Robert Jones were the only two people on earth who knew if the bay mare happened to be well or ill.

Aunt Jane was longing to find the Wrenstones at home, for she had never been inside the Abbey since her nephew's marriage, and she had heard the drawing-room was newly furnished, after a perfectly strange fashion, and in very queer colours, and with two oddly shaped looking-glasses, all set round with blue china kitchen-plates. Her curiosity was intense; but she "argued" in vain with my uncle. He insisted upon only ordering the carriage when he pleased.

The Wrenstones' London *not-at-homes* irritated Uncle Sherbrook, and their assumption of superiority to the ordinary rules of good manners in country parts awakened the spirit of contrariety within him. Had the Rigardy-Wrenstones invented their fine airs themselves, I do not think Uncle Sherbrook

would have minded them ; for he thought Jumping Georgy bad style, and had an intense contempt for Denis, of whom he used to say, "That peer of the realm boasts as if he were an upstart whose ancestors had never spoken to a gentleman." But the Wrenstones invented nothing,—they only copied the mistress of Manyfields. Lady Offaway filled her house with *people one meets in town*, and would be civil to no *Aborigines* except the clergyman and his wife—fine ladies always do patronise the clergy. My uncle considered Lady Offaway the most ill-bred woman he had ever met, and was quite determined *he* would not give in to any of the airs and fashions she might set in Dullshire.

It was certainly rather funny Jumping Georgy should think the Marchioness of Offaway a model of good style, and offend her neighbours, and patronise no *Aborigines* but the Rector and Mary Sherbrook ; and it was all the more strange because Lady Offaway had been rude to the Rigardy-Wrenstones, and had never as yet taken the slightest notice of them.

When at length, at the end of a full month, my uncle allowed Aunt Jane to return her niece's visit, he ordered the carriage on one of those days when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was supposed not to be at home : Aunt Jane would rather the bay mare had coughed that day and been well the next. For my part, I was glad the precious animal felt in good health on one of those days when the Drill-Sergeant did not hold a parade for the *Aborigines*. I had no wish to meet Denis ; I thought he had been ungrateful and cold-hearted to my poor mother, and I knew she had felt his ingratitude ; therefore it rather pained me to think of seeing him,—and as to his wife, she startled me and scattered my senses.

So I drove to the Abbey with Aunt Jane in a quiet frame of mind. My happy state was a little disturbed as we came near the house, for I saw Denis leaning out of the drawing-room window, and talking to quite a crowd of people on the lawn—doubtless the Furleys, Tuttertons, Castletowers, Hartmoors, and Dumbledores. They all looked towards the approaching carriage, but my cousin took no further notice of us.

"There is Denis !" exclaimed Aunt Jane.

"For goodness' sake, Aunt Jane," I said, "don't look at him ! He is not at home." However, I had qualms in my own mind, and feared the parade-days might be changed.

When we had driven to the hall-door, my aunt could no longer see her nephew, the entrance being at one side of the house and the drawing-room windows to the front.

The servant said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was not at home. Aunt Jane sent Thomas back to inquire if Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone were at home. "Not at home!" said the butler severely, and in a manner which cowed Thomas.

"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone must be out driving with the Duchess," I remarked aside to Aunt Jane. But I was mistaken, for as we turned and drove away from the door, there stood Jumping Georgy on the lawn, not ten yards from the avenue. She wore her eye-glass, so we came, as it were, eye to eye. Aunt Jane bowed to her, with an upper lip and a dignity awful to behold. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone dropped her eye-glass and turned very red. If she did not bow, it was because she was too much flurried to do so.

Denis still leant out of the drawing-room window, so Aunt Jane gave him a very low bow. He returned it smiling, and with a wave of the hand. My aunt was sorely piqued to see him unabashed.

Our visit to the Abbey was an inexhaustible topic of conversation for Aunt Jane. She told my uncle what had occurred. He listened to her with unusual attention, looked very stern, begged her to say no more on the subject, and said nothing else himself. His look and his silence showed me the Rigardy-Wrenstones' conduct had insulted him deeply.

From trying, though ineffectually, to stay her flowing indignation in Uncle Sherbrook's presence, Aunt Jane only talked the more unceasingly to me; and for once in my life I was glad she did so, as the day after our visit to the Abbey was the first anniversary of my mother's death. I had looked forward with a miserable trembling heart to this dreaded day. I had tried to forget when it would be, but the effort had only fixed the date more clearly in my mind. I had not dared to hope Aunt Jane and Snipkins would forget the anniversary, because I hoped for nothing now—it was a habit I had lost. Memory should be blind—it is terrible not only to remember but to see the finished agony again in every awful detail before your very eyes. This sight, from which there is no turning away, unmans strong nerves, and makes weeping fools of weak ones.

Uncle Sherbrook never forgot a date. I was sure he remembered the anniversary, and wished to avoid "Jane's scenes," because he announced his intention of going to Vottingham on important business immediately after breakfast, though the bay mare had been out the day before.

To my unspeakable relief, Aunt Jane seemed to remember nothing but the insult she had received at the Abbey. I noticed

Snipkins's absence at prayer-time, and on asking, was glad to hear from my aunt that her maid had been sitting up all night nursing Sally Smith. When Snipkins went on an errand of mercy, and "nursed" old Tommies and Sallies, she was much muddled the next day. So I took heart and dared to hope Aunt Jane would not be reminded of the anniversary.

That whole morning, that whole livelong day, my aunt continued talking about the Rigardy-Wrenstones, and the more she talked the more indignant did she grow. I am glad to say she became a little exhausted towards night, after dinner, and took up a tract and dozed.

I spoke to Uncle Sherbrook of the weather, and hoped Aunt Jane might sleep soundly, but she awoke before long, to talk again with fresh energy. The running stream carried her so far that we seemed to be on the verge of—"Poor, dear Sophia." I had to seize her transition, give an abrupt twist to it, and manage the conversation till prayer-time. I made Uncle Sherbrook stare, for I talked and laughed loudly—as cowards do who would frighten away a ghost. Yet my laughter pained me like weeping.

Next morning I observed that Snipkins slept through the Commentary, so I was not surprised to hear Aunt Jane wondering upon cheerful subjects. But the day, after Snipkins looked herself again, and my aunt came down to early prayers with tearful eyes. I am thankful to say Aunt Jane did not think it her duty to remain in hysterics all day long. She let me comfort her, and persuade her that to cry on the 1st of September, when she ought to have cried on the 30th of August, was no compliment to her poor, dear sister's memory; rather the contrary, because it showed she had forgotten the anniversary. She asked if I had remembered the day, and was shocked beyond measure to find that I had. "Why, Sophy, if this is the 1st of September, the 30th of August must have been the day before yesterday, and that was the day your uncle went to Vottingham. Yes, Sophy, I am sure your uncle went to Vottingham the day before yesterday; and I remember you talked and laughed more than usual, for you hardly ever laugh, and even Edward noticed you were in good spirits."

Aunt Jane thought me heartless. This was an infinite blessing to me, for now at last she was satisfied that she felt poor, dear Sophia's death more than I did. "I should have cried all day on Thursday if I had known it was the anniversary. I know I should, Sophy; I know I should!"

From henceforth my aunt did not consider it necessary to be

inconsolable. So she allowed her thoughts to be more and more engrossed by the exciting events of her exciting life.

Rigardy-Wrenstone, most unexpectedly, made an exciting event in Aunt Jane's life by getting a sudden fit of civility. It was one of my cousin's peculiarities never to avoid any one he had treated in an uncivil or cavalier manner—he would even go far out of his way to meet a person to whom he had been particularly rude. He liked handling his own importance visibly, as a miser likes touching his gold. Rigardy-Wrenstone never seemed to feel he was a really great man unless he could insult you to-day and patronise you to-morrow; for he loved to patronise, and had a taste for popularity, which he liked to gratify when it did not interfere with his other tastes.

On the Sunday following our memorable visit to the Abbey, Denis stayed behind his Dumbledores, Castletowers, Hartmoors, Tuttertons, and Furleys, and waited for us at the church door. He met us with a flourish of politeness, and was in a state of glorious condescension.

"How do, Jane? how do, Sherbrook?" he seemed to my astonished ear to be saying; and he gave a wave of his hand to "Sophy." My uncle looked sternly dignified, slightly raised his hat, and walked on.

Uncle Sherbrook's stonily contemptuous manner only made Denis the more intensely civil to Aunt Jane. He insisted upon carrying her great big prayer-book, like Goliath's head, in a triumphal procession all along the path to the churchyard-gate. My hymn-book was also seized upon, and I was patronised. Rigardy-Wrenstone made Aunt Jane lean upon his arm, and asked her opinion of the sermon. This temptation was not to be resisted: my aunt had such pleasure in giving a really sound opinion, that she talked herself into good-humour. Having once begun to give forth sound doctrine, she could not stop. She stood by the wicket-gate talking to Denis for a long time, much to the surprise of Robert Jones and the horses. My cousin encouraged her with pleasant flattery.

At parting Aunt Jane was quite affectionate to Rigardy-Wrenstone, and promised to send him Dr MacShaw's 'Sound Sentiments, or Sound Seed sown upon Sound Subjects.'

Uncle Sherbrook had walked home.

On Sunday we dined at three o'clock, and Uncle Sherbrook took his after-dinner rest in the afternoon instead of in the evening. Aunt Jane seriously disturbed his quiet hour by giving him a fit of astonishment. She praised Denis very much, and remarked that he was an improved character. She said something about

good seed sown in youth by those labourers in the Lord's vine-yard to whom had been vouchsafed the gift of exercising a beneficial influence upon young people.

Gracious ! thought I ; she must mean herself ! No one else answers the description.

The change in my aunt was sudden—from blame to praise and satisfaction.

“Good heavens, Jane !” exclaimed my uncle, starting up in his arm-chair — “good heavens, Jane ! what has come over you ?”

“ My dear Edward !” screamed my aunt, “ do I look pale ? perhaps I am ill ? Sophy, call Snipkins !”

Aunt Jane had not the slightest idea of her husband's meaning. This did not surprise me, as I had often observed she could be unaware of a change in her own mind : that mind, being without backbone, could bend all ways.

Uncle Sherbrook clearly explained to his wife the cause of his astonishment ; but without effect. He could get no satisfactory answer from her. In fending and proving, he only grasped at his own reflection in the stream, and found his hand was full of water. He asked Aunt Jane what had occurred to make so great a change in her feelings towards Denis ; and my aunt declared she had not changed at all—that she was a person who never did change, or could change, to anybody : she made a grievance of the accusation, and from this grievance slipped through my uncle's fingers into another—and so on, and so on.

In despair the poor man turned to me and talked about the weather. The truth is, Aunt Jane had been flattered into a new state of feeling ; and flattery is an opiate which gives us pleasant dreams, so that, not believing we have dreamt, we find impressions on our waking mind, and think they were always there because we did not consciously receive them.

CHAPTER XX.

The Rector became seriously ill, and Dr Daly said he must take a holiday ; so Uncle Sherbrook sent him a cheque for £100, and he and Mary went away for change of air.

During the Rev. James's absence, Rigardy-Wrenstone seemed to persuade himself he was bishop of the diocese, and that the

living was in his own gift. He accordingly instituted Jumping Georgy rector of the parish. It is true, a curate came from a distance, and undertook those parts of the service which neither the great man nor his wife could legally perform ; but you hardly noticed this clergyman.

The Rev. George played the harmonium and kept strict order in the sacred edifice. She wore her eye-glass, and noticed if any one was late for the voluntary, and sent that person a message to be in time next Sunday. She introduced *introits* and a new hymnal. My uncle and aunt had grave doubt as to the "soundness" of this compilation, and were quite sure the *introits* were Ritualistic.

The Rev. George decked the Holy Communion table in an elaborate altar-cloth. She carpeted the east end with what Aunt Jane called a "High Church carpet," and she put a deep band of worsted-work to match round the pulpit and reading-desk. The design of this work was peculiar : a stiff stick, with a stiff leaf low down at each side, grew straight up into a round flat something, which might perhaps have been a sunflower had it been a flower at all. This strange plant grew all alone : there was no connecting branch between it and the next plant. It was worked in palish yellow on a sickly green ground.

Aunt Jane considered the pattern "High," and the colours "very, very High." Uncle Sherbrook thoroughly disapproved of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's "upholstery."

The female rector also decorated her husband's own particular reading-desk with worsted-work of the same peculiar pattern ; for she gave him a desk all to himself. The Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone read the lessons in the presence of his tenantry, his neighbours, and his distinguished guests. He read as if he were paying the Almighty a compliment !

Rigardy-Wrenstone passed round the bag with his own Right Reverend hands. I had hitherto thought this a churchwarden's commonplace duty, but Denis performed it as if it were an act of gracious condescension. When he handed the bag to the tenantry of his own and Uncle Sherbrook's estates, he bowed at the end of the pew, then turned round sideways in the aisle, folded his arms, and looked ostentatiously towards the ceiling. And this he did from pew to pew—bowing, turning round, folding his arms, and tossing his head upwards. Had he performed these ceremonies once or twice, you might not have noticed them ; but when he went through this exercise of bowing, turning, folding his arms, and tossing his head, down the whole

length of the aisle, this repetition of the same motions caught your attention. It was as if my cousin said aloud, "Good people, I graciously permit you to put in your pennies unobserved. Do not be alarmed or hurried by my grandeur, but take your time. I fold my arms, and look away."

When the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone entered our square pew, he laid aside this ostentatious delicacy, and became a keen observer. One Sunday, while her nephew still stood high in her favour, Aunt Jane forgot her purse. I heard her whispering to my uncle on and off during the service. When Rigardy-Wrenstone brought round the bag, Uncle Sherbrook put in half-a-crown. Aunt Jane put in nothing. She shook her head. The bishop of the diocese assumed an air of severe displeasure, and continued holding the bag to my aunt; so she said in a loud whisper, "Your uncle has given a shilling for me." Upon this Denis handed the bag a second time to Uncle Sherbrook, thereby intimating that he considered half-a-crown an insufficient offering for two people.

Uncle Sherbrook stared a moment in utter amazement. Then he gravely put his hand into the bag and took out the half-crown, and was going to replace it in his own pocket, when he stayed his hand and said audibly—"I am wrong. It was not to you I gave this money." And he put it back again into the bag.

The Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone passed on.

When the service was finished, my cousin did not wait behind his friends, or offer to carry Aunt Jane's big prayer-book. He did wisely to walk on, for my uncle was much incensed by his nephew's impertinent attempt at tyranny and coercion.

Uncle Sherbrook's irritation was not lessened by a message which the Rev. George sent Aunt Jane through the parish-clerk. The female rector requested Mrs Sherbrook would keep her remarks to herself during divine service, as the words Mrs Sherbrook had spoken while the collection was being made were audible at the harmonium.

The clerk gave this message nervously. There was something about Uncle Sherbrook which awed the whole village, even the parish-clerk, great and irremovable dignitary of the Church as he was. My uncle, in reply, ordered him to tell Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, with his compliments, "that ladies were not permitted to be churchwardens."

I thought it likely the clerk would give this message word for word; for though he might do so at the peril of his life, he could not imperil the tenure of his office. Old Tom was clerk of Harefield Church by divine right: he used to boast that Par-

liament turned out its Disraylies and Gladstones, but could not turn him out, not nor it was all made up of Bishops and Harchbishops ; the likes of them had nothing to say to him ; he was his own master—"and the Rector he knows it. We gets on well together, for he does not come ha-meddling with my prerogatties, and I don't go ha-meddling with his."

I felt certain the Rev. George was sure to have meddled with old Tom's prerogatives.

If I had any doubt of the clerk's courage, it was dispelled by a little circumstance which occurred next day. When Uncle Sherbrook drove through the village to Mr Jones's office, he noticed nothing new. But on his way home he thought there was something unusual in the look of the "Sherbrook Arms." He stopped the carriage a little way down the street, and got out to see what the something could be. My uncle told us he did not like his carriage to be seen standing before a public-house, and he did not think it right to set the village a bad example by sending Thomas to inquire what alteration Hodgkin had made in the outside of his establishment. The village might have thought Thomas was drinking beer. So my uncle went himself in his own dignified person, and told a workman who was standing by the Sherbrook Arms to send the landlord out to him.

My uncle said Hodgkin was much surprised at his inquiries, and expressed the greatest astonishment at finding Uncle Sherbrook had not noticed his new sign-board. My uncle looked up and saw the WRENSTONE ARMS painted in fresh capital letters where he had seen the SHERBROOK ARMS for sixty years. The green bear had also disappeared, and in its stead there was the unfinished sketch of Sire Denis-de-l'Arrière-Garde's helmet. I give the rest of the story in Uncle Sherbrook's own words : "I said to Hodgkin, 'Pray, Mr Landlord, for what very good reason have you changed the name and sign your house has borne these many years, and bore in your father's lifetime ?' The man declared to me, Jane, that your nephew had been at him this long time to change them, and had finally told him yesterday afternoon he would send round a sign-painter to do the job at his own expense. 'Upon my honour, sir,' said Hodgkin, 'Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone would give me no peace. He came telling me that you, sir, thought it an offence to have your name on my establishment, and that Mrs Sherbrook considered it a sin ; and very sorry,' said the man, 'I was to hear it.' I think Hodgkin was sorry, though he is an impertinent fellow for all that—a con—"

“ My dear Edward ! ” screamed my aunt.

“ He had the impudence to tell me he saw I should like to have my name and arms upon his house again, and that if I would say the word, it should be done. So I told him plainly he had better take care what he saw, and only see things that were to be seen ; and I said if he dared to put my name again upon a public-house, he should not hear the end of it in a hurry. I said no more, but just walked away. I am glad I kept my temper—some men would have lost theirs.”

“ But, my dear Edward,” said Aunt Jane, “ you never, never lose your temper ! I know you never do ! ”

I was convinced old Tom had taken my uncle’s message to the Abbey. The sign-board was the quick revenge.

Denis is certainly a little-minded tease. No one but a man (should I say a woman ?) with a real taste for huffing his neighbours could have invented the odd and pettifogging little ways of worrying them that he invented. In its very small way, this last touch of worry was a masterpiece. Any one who knew Uncle Sherbrook as Denis knew him, was well aware he did not really dislike to see his name and arms upon the village inn. My uncle’s old Scotch ancestor was not angry when a set of tipsy retainers, with no particular name or clothes of their own, took the chief’s name as they took their wife’s tartan petticoat,—because it was the most honourable covering to their nakedness they could lay hands upon. The Highlanders glorified themselves by assuming the name of the greatest man amongst them ; but in doing so, they proved he was the greatest man, and therefore did not offend him.

The late lamented Hodgkin showed the village of Harefield that Sherbrook was the most honourable name a man could drink to. My uncle preached against the public-house as a chieftain might against the vices of his clan, without a thought of abdication. Aunt Jane considered beer an abomination, yet somehow the idea of being offended by the “ Sherbrook Arms ” had never struck her.

Thus Rigardy-Wrenstone had the satisfaction of conferring an open boon and a secret annoyance upon his aunt and uncle. To a mind like his this must have been a satisfaction !

As for me, I could not help being amused by the ingenious contrivance. The two Sherbrooks were a comedy—my aunt the funnier character of the two ; because Uncle Sherbrook betrayed his great annoyance chiefly by a stern silence, but Aunt Jane ran through a series of transitions, which led her into a sad falling off from her strictest principles. I had it on

the tip of my tongue to call her a backslider, but I thought the word did not quite suit a mind that was really sliding all ways at once.

Next Sunday, Rigardy-Wrenstone met us at the church-door in a state of magnificent elation. He condescended to patronise Uncle Sherbrook, who, by the way, did not condescend to patronise him. My cousin carried Goliath's head in triumph, and did the honours of the church and surrounding territory as if they belonged to him. His manner and shirt-cuffs on this occasion amused me. He was certainly a very stylish lord of the manor and bishop of the diocese; and you could see he gave such complete satisfaction to himself, especially as bishop of the diocese! The pity was, that this satisfaction should not have been shared by the parishioners.

The Right Reverend the bishop of the diocese, and the Reverend the female rector of Harefield, worked admirably together; but unfortunately their ritual grew higher and higher every Sunday, until the village felt itself rapidly going over to Rome. The climax of Popish scandal was reached on the very last Sunday before the Reverend James's return, when the Reverend George placed a pair of lighted candles in remarkably tall candlesticks on the altar,—for Harefield believed with all its soul that the female rector placed them there with her own hands. It is certain old Tom did not do the illegal act: this pillar of the Church strongly objected to "Rittalistic practices," and loudly complained that his "prerogatties and the Rector's" had been infringed.

The candles and candlesticks shocked Aunt Jane and the whole congregation. They were an abomination in the sight of Uncle Sherbrook.

The Reverend James returned to his parish while the candles were still burning in his church. I pitied the poor man! His illness had lowered him; and though he came home better than he went away, he was far from well. When strong, he disliked making up his mind to an important decision; he must have hated it when ill.

The very day he arrived, Denis and Uncle Sherbrook met to do battle at the rectory. They must have tortured James Sherbrook, as they disagreed on every subject; and no doubt the Rector wished to agree with both of them! The interview ended by a compromise. The Reverend James consented to retain the hymnal, the carpet, and the worsted-work, but rejected the altar-cloth, the *introits*, the candles and candlesticks. This decision pleased neither Denis nor Uncle Sherbrook; but

then it did not altogether displease either of them. Not so with their wives. Aunt Jane accused her husband of permitting the thin end of the wedge to be introduced with his consent. The Reverend George went in person and reproved the Reverend James (not too gently, it was said) for having truckled to the prejudices of the Low Church. She also told his wife not to trouble herself about the church-music, as she had arranged with the choir what hymns should be sung.

And behold, when, on the Sunday following the Reverend James's return, Mary Sherbrook walked into church at the head of her school-children, who should she find already seated at the harmonium but the female rector of Harefield! Old Tom said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had been sitting there from an early hour. The Reverend George played a *fugue* of Bach's on the old harmonium, though it has two stiff stops.

The clerk by right divine of Harefield, considered his clergyman's wife had been deprived of her prerogative, and showed his sentiments by making himself generally disagreeable to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and by disobeying most of her numerous orders. Moreover, when the great musician played Bach, the clerk told the butler from the Abbey that "his congregation did not approve of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's jigs; his congregation thought Mrs Sherbrook's psalm-tunes more church-like." The remark was repeated to the Reverend George, who forthwith begged the Reverend James to dismiss the parish-clerk for impudence. Upon the Rector's declaring he had no power to do so, the Reverend George tried to dismiss old Tom herself; but Tom would not go. He upheld his divine right in a stanch and disagreeable manner,—for old Tom's temper was far from amiable when rubbed the wrong way. The female rector and the parish-clerk were not on pleasant terms together.

CHAPTER XXI

Mary Sherbrook bore her deposition from the harmonium mildly, but not without tears. I was a person to whom Mary told her many disappointments, her secret hopes, her joys. I knew the little woman in all her silliness, her weakness, her vanity, her devotedness—for she is devoted in her own way—to her husband and children. She used to say no one ever

listened to her but me, and she would wish I could often come to see her alone. But Aunt Jane was sadly offended if I paid a visit without her. It was not really by listening that I gained Mary's affections—I bribed her to love me with pretty colours. She does not know this, but I do. Mary knows nothing about herself or other people, for she has never in her life reflected upon any person or thing.

When kind friends gave the clergyman's wife a present, they invariably made her some useful ugly gift, for they seemed to think nothing could be useful that was not ugly. Thus Aunt Jane gave her four dozen yards of a most serviceable woollen material—a sort of green and yellow Scotch plaid. My aunt recommended her to make plaid trousers for the two elder boys if any stuff were left over from the other children's frocks. Mary invented excuses, and tried to evade a rash promise. But Aunt Jane took it into her head that Mary Sherbrook thought there would not be stuff enough; so she sent to Scotland for more green and yellow plaid, and had the boys' little trousers, jackets, and waistcoats made by a tailor in Vottingham, "as a pleasant surprise." If a stranger had passed through Harefield just then, he would have thought the tobacconist's wooden Scotchman had a very large family.

Aunt Jane said, "I love to see a little family dressed all alike in sensible warm clothing." She would have been offended had the children not regularly worn the plaid suits, for she admired her own useful present.

The unfortunate mother of the green and yellow clan suffered much. Mary Sherbrook had a great eye for elegance and beauty. It is a rare gift amongst Englishwomen of her class; or should I call it a rare misfortune?—because an instinct which might be a blessing will not unfrequently become a curse if it can find no satisfaction in our own station in life. Mary's unbounded admiration for beauty, elegance, and refinement might have wrecked her happiness, for she had no strength of character. Her good fortune in marrying the handsome, refined young gentleman she fell in love with, was no common one for a yeoman farmer's daughter,—not even when the girl has an intriguing mother clever enough to make a boy engage himself at nineteen. Few men of family, like James Sherbrook, would have kept to the secret engagement at twenty-three.

Elegant furniture, a well-made dress, soft colours, and "sweetly pretty" ribbons, have an irresistible attraction for the Rector's wife. There are shades of grey and pink which she loves to call "aristocratic." The word is an odd and

vulgar but a true expression of her feeling. She does not associate pale, tender colours with the homely friends of her youth!

Whenever my mother and I made Mary Sherbrook a present, we took care it should be a pretty one. I never shall forget her saying to me after my mother's death, "Poor dear Mrs Thursley! I was very fond of her, Sophy; and she gave me the prettiest and most becoming bonnet I ever had!"

I had sympathy with the failing most people upbraided in Mary, because there is pity within me for all unsatisfied longings, even when they are foolish ones. So when I heard the whooping-cough had come to the rectory, knowing the younger children were whooping in the last remains of the Scotch plaid, I had four little buttoned-coats made of grey cashmere, long enough to hide the plaid frocks. The coats had short capes lined with pink silk. I did not wish Aunt Jane or Snipkins to see them; but they found them out! Nothing belonging to "Sophy" could remain hidden! The useless pink lining shocked Aunt Jane. It scandalised Snipkins, just as if the coats were intended for the workhouse! Snipkins objected to the Sherbrook children, and said they gave trouble wherever they went.

I waited to take the little coats to the rectory until the next large case of groceries arrived at Sherbrook Hall from London.

Mary's delight at the sight of the little garments was interesting to see. But when she tried them on the children, and found they quite covered the green and yellow frocks, her joy knew no bounds. She kissed me; and then, as Aunt Jane was not with me, she took my hand and confided to me the secret sorrow of her heart. She told me, with tears rolling down her cheeks, that she feared Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone would never again let her play the harmonium in church, "except in the afternoon, Sophy, when there is no one there." Sending the staring children from the room, she indulged in what she herself called "a good cry." Mary pressed my hand and looked at me piteously, so I made the most consoling speech I could think of in a hurry. "Don't cry, Mary," I said; "Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will soon break another stop, and then she can't play Bach on the harmonium. Powerful music powerfully played will put the old instrument quite out of order. So be hopeful and lively, my dear; before long Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not care to play at the morning service." Mary's face brightened at this cheerful prospect. She said, "I think, Sophy, I could play the Old Hundredth if there

was only one stop left." And she dried her eyes, but cried again, and then said she felt better, and smiled and kissed me. "Dear, dear Sophy," said she, "I feel quite happy now. It is so pleasant to have a good cry! Is not it?" I did not know what to say to this, so I said, "Indeed!" as if I were speaking to Aunt Jane.

Mary likes crying. She really enjoys it! Oh, tears which to some are bitter miseries wrenched from the heart, what are you to others? Melted sugar-plums, I think, sweet to the taste.

When Aunt Jane found that instead of walking all alone on the back avenue, I had taken advantage of the great grocery ceremony to pay a visit at the rectory, she thought herself an aggrieved woman. My aunt was huffed if I went anywhere without her, or spoke to any one. Could I ever have walked alone, I should not even have dared to go into the cottages or speak to the poor people. Long ago Aunt Jane used to visit at every cottage on the estate, but she no longer did so. Snipkins would not let her, but visited and gave clothes and money in her stead.

Though Aunt Jane felt so hurt because I went to the rectory without her—"when you know, Sophy, I wish to go there"—she let a fortnight pass before she paid Mary Sherbrook a visit. "We shall be down at the front avenue-gate this afternoon," I would say. "Why not walk on to the rectory and pay your visit?" But this simple arrangement would not do at all. Aunt Jane chose to think her first visit to the rectory after "James's absence" should be paid in state.

"Your uncle always drives to Mr Jones's office; and if the carriage is never seen at the rectory, the village will talk."

"Drive then," said I. "Tell Uncle Sherbrook you only want to go to the rectory, and the bay mare will be well."

"Sophy," said my aunt, "you are very conceited, and you think you know everything; but how can you tell if the bay mare is coughing or not? No one knows anything about the horses' health except your uncle and Robert; and besides, Sophy, you have no knowledge of the world, or of the great difficulty there is in arranging what to do when people who are your own connections by marriage have distant relations who are quite common people; and you never seem to understand how very awkward it is for me to drive to the rectory because of Robert."

"Robert! What Robert?" asked I.

"Robert Jones," said Aunt Jane.

"The coachman?" cried I.

"To be sure," said Aunt Jane; "for, you know, Snipkins says he is a distant relation of old Jack Jones."

"I know it? I did not know anything of the sort. Just like Snipkins!"

"What are you saying, Sophy?" asked my aunt; but she did not wait for an answer. "And Jack Jones," she continued, "is Mary's grandfather. Such a connection for James! and Snipkins thinks Robert must be Mary's fifth cousin."

"Well, well!" I exclaimed, impatiently; "what a fuss about nothing! No one ever recognises a fifth cousin unless he is a duke! But you like making little difficulties, Aunt Jane. They are events, they are landmarks to you, because your life is too easy, and the road lies too straight before you. You are tired of living in a flat country, so you heap up all the earth in your garden, and you make a mound of it; and when you have stepped over the mound, you think you have scaled a mountain."

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed my aunt; "I know you think I am always in the wrong—and Snipkins says you do; but I have never walked over the mound in the garden, for I never walk on the flower-beds at all; but you do, Sophy, and you walk on the grass; but I won't argue with you, Sophy! It is no good arguing! Though it was Edward—it was your uncle who made that mound; and I don't think he has ever been so well since, for I consider that mound damp and unhealthy, because there is so much earth together, and it all catches the rain; and then the wet trickles down under the garden-wall on to the back avenue, and Snipkins says I get my feet wet."

To this day Aunt Jane is convinced I think she made the mound in the middle of the garden at Sherbrook Hall?

But were we to drive to the rectory, or were we not? This highly important question was at length decided, and in the following manner: After the matter had been "argued" in my hearing for a full fortnight on both avenues, my aunt walked one morning from the breakfast-table into the study, leaning upon Uncle Sherbrook's arm. "There is business weighing on her upper lip," thought I, "and affairs of state are poised in her measured tread." So I ran into the library and took out an interesting book I had hidden under the sofa-cushions ages before. At last I shall spend a happy hour! What a relief! But five minutes had not passed when Aunt Jane opened the door with a "Sophy! Sophy!"

"Heavens!" cried I, flinging my book on the floor in a fit of

disgust ; "what is the matter now ? Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane ! what teasing little bother is the worry now ?"

"Sophy ! Sophy !" repeated my aunt, not coming a step farther into the room, and looking bewildered—"Sophy, you might get up and come when I call you ; and go and put on your things, for the carriage will be at the door in twenty minutes ; and Edward says we must not keep the horses waiting ; and indeed we had better not, for I don't know what is the matter with Edward, for when I asked him how Robert Jones could drive to the rectory when Snipkins says Robert is Mary Sherbrook's cousin, your uncle called poor Snipkins an impertinent busybody ; and I am sure Snipkins never interferes in anything ! And Edward said it was the height of impudence to suppose his cousin's wife was connected with Robert Jones ; and he said the carriage should go to the rectory this very morning, and show all the gossips in Harefield that the Sherbrooks were his cousins, and nobody else's ; and Edward said we must not keep the horses waiting ; and he said it three times, and quite in a loud voice, Sophy."

"She went to the joiner to buy him a coffin,
And when she came back the dog was a-laughing."

We do not always find people exactly in the humour we expect them to be in ; so it would be well if each of us could look into a fairy mirror, and by wishing, see our friend before we rang at his door. If Mary Sherbrook had been a lucky woman, her fairy godmother would have held such a mirror to Aunt Jane. As it happened, the contrast between the poor Mary my aunt expected to see, and the Mary she really saw, made her think "James's wife" just the frivolous sort of hair-plaiting young person that would have scandalised St Peter.

Aunt Jane was shocked—there is no other word for it,—she was shocked to find Mary Sherbrook in her best dress and best spirits, when for a whole fortnight she had pictured to herself the Rector's wife as a humble creature shrinking from the sight of Robert Jones, and entirely occupied in making humiliating reflections on the social position of her distant cousins. Instead of this poor being—"such a connection for James!"—we found the pretty little brown-eyed lady dressed out in pale dove-colour, with a pink ribbon round her slender throat, and pink ribbons in her dark hair ; a smart little lady, whose mind, Aunt Jane soon discovered, did not dwell with poor relations, but was elated into the very heights of fashion.

The tidiness of the rectory drawing-room was remarkable ;

and it was only half-past eleven, and yet no children were to be seen! Remarkable, too, was the length of Mary's new gown, and still more remarkable was the air with which the little lady, throwing aside her worsted-work, drew herself up and came to meet us, stepping high, and twisting her shoulders and her skirts for all the world like Jumping Georgy! I expected a "Thankee!"

Usually Aunt Jane's severe propriety alarms Mary, and makes her quite silent; but this day Mary seemed to have put on a new nature with her new airs and new ribbons. We were not seated before she exclaimed, "Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, did you pass Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's carriage in the village? and is it coming this way?" Her face flushed with anxious excitement.

"I have not seen Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's carriage," said Aunt Jane, in a repressive tone; "but indeed, I doubt my knowing it if I did see it, for I have seen it but seldom, as Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone does not tire her horses visiting her husband's relations."

"Oh, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is so kind for such a wonderfully fashionable person," replied Mary, unabashed; "and I do think now, Sophy, she is right to play the harmonium in the morning, because it might seem quite odd to the villagers if she only played in the afternoon. Really, I never saw such a fashionable person; and her dresses show so well upon her, particularly when she walks, just as if they knew they were moving in *stylish society*. And Lady Tutterton! Oh, Mrs Sherbrook, she is charming—so very nice; and she came here last Tuesday to see me, and she had the most becoming hat on. You cannot imagine anything more becoming to her style of feature." Aunt Jane's looks were stony. "Do you know, Sophy," said Mary, turning to me—"do you know, Lady Tutterton wore a dress of exactly the same colour as this one of mine! and I had ordered this without knowing it was the new fashion. Smith was making it at the time; and, Sophy, I was quite satisfied with all the directions I had given; and the only new idea I took from Lady Tutterton's dress was in the length of the skirt. I told Smith to make this a yard longer than usual behind. How do you like it, Sophy?"

Mary Sherbrook rose, looked at Aunt Jane, and hesitated; and then she looked at me. I longed to be good-natured, and encourage her to show her pretty finery; but I heard my aunt groan, and I saw her eyes rolling to the ceiling. I knew she would think "James's wife" a tinkling cymbal and a pearl in

the snout of a swine ; so I answered poor Mary with a forbidding look. It is painful to snub the little pleasures of others when you have sympathy with every kind of joy—when you would be glad yourself if a new gown could make you happy. My aunt sighed again. “A colour that will not last,” said she, solemnly passing sentence of death—“a colour that will not last, Mary, and a material that has no wear in it !” Mary Sherbrook sat down and hid the blushes of disappointment by bending to pick up her worsted-work.

Aunt Jane talked on, and said some stuffs wore much better than others ; “and Smith tells me drabs are what he calls fast colours, while greys are sure to fly.” I need hardly say my aunt did not fail to mix good moral advice with the expensive cashmeres and the cheaper merinoes ; she even quoted the Scriptures.

But sound doctrine let loose in a rectory, makes no sensation there. Clergymen’s wives are so accustomed to sermons, that many of them get a way of acquiescing in sound moral sentiments without listening to them. From time to time Mary said, “Just so ; very true ; yes, to be sure ; ah ! oh !” She did her worsted-work and counted her stitches quite quietly, without showing any signs of impatience or the slightest inclination to interrupt Aunt Jane. In fact, sermons and the Proverbs of Solomon were a second nature to her.

Once only did Mary raise her eyes. She dropped the worsted-work, gazed out of the window, and for a moment listened breathlessly ; then turned to her work again, whispering to me, “Only a cart, Sophy—only a cart.”

Aunt Jane, fully occupied with her own admirable sayings, did not notice this little aside, but went on stringing conjunctions and sound doctrine together as glibly as if she had only just begun to talk. My aunt is like most voluble preachers in and out of the pulpit. Her sermons have a beginning, but no middle, and never an end. If she does finish, it is by accident.

While Aunt Jane was still discoursing hopelessly, the design of Mary’s worsted-work accidentally caught her eye. The pattern was that same peculiar yellow plant with which the Reverend George had decorated the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone’s reading-desk. My aunt stopped short : she had suddenly perceived the mark of the Beast !

“Mary,” cried she, “what Ritualistic, Puseyite Papist designed that pattern ?”

“Just so, just so,” replied Mary, mechanically.

“Justojusto ?” exclaimed Aunt Jane ; “and pray, who is

Mr Justojusto? A fine Italian Popish name for an English Church milliner to have!"

Mary looked up amazed, understanding nothing. She had answered imagining the sermon to be still going on, for she was not paying sufficient attention to know it had ceased. No one could believe the difficulty there was in explaining this little misunderstanding to the two misunderstood. They were neither of them very quick of apprehension.

At length Aunt Jane realised that James's wife was busy working, at Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's request, a strip of church embroidery in the "Highest" hues.

My aunt was scandalised to find the audacious Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had introduced the thin end of the wedge into the heart of the Rector's own wife. The great Popish plot was nothing to this! "James himself will be her next victim!" exclaimed Aunt Jane. "Oh, Mary, Mary," said she, "can you, the wife of a clergyman of the pure Church of England, take pleasure in such colours as these?"

"They are a little sickly," replied Mary, "and I should prefer pink and grey."

"But do you feel no objection to them for another reason, Mary? I mean, as an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual backsliding?"

"Very true," said the Reverend James's wife, who seemed to be quietly settling down for another sermon.

And in truth Aunt Jane looked as if she had a mind to preach again; but at this moment a carriage was heard in the distance.

"It is she! it is she!" exclaimed Mary Sherbrook, jumping up in great excitement, and running to the window; "she is in the pony carriage, and I can see it turning up our lane from the county road, and Lady Tutterton is with her. Oh, Sophy, Sophy, do ring the bell, and Anne will have time to wash her hands."

Aunt Jane asked, "What on earth has happened? Who is expected?" But Mary gave no answer, for she was quite taken up settling the antimacassars.

I told Aunt Jane it was Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone who was coming. Rising, she said to Mary, "Then I will say good-morning." Now, I am quite sure Aunt Jane would have liked to stay had Mary pressed her. Mary Sherbrook was not sufficiently a woman of the world to say, "Oh dear no! Pray, do not run away!" So she said, "I will call Robert Jones," and she opened the window in all haste, and called to the coachman,

who was at the other side of the gravel-sweep, to drive forward immediately. She ordered her fifth cousin after quite an imperial fashion. Mary was rapidly preparing her grandest manners for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's reception.

Aunt Jane took leave with much dignity, and left the house in state. We passed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone driving her ponies on the avenue. Aunt Jane told Robert to stop, but Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drove on.

All the way home, and all the afternoon, and all the evening, my aunt lamented over the thin end of the wedge she had perceived at the rectory.

Aunt Jane did not care for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. But we often like attention to be shown us by those we do not care for. It did not please Aunt Jane to find Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone patronising Mary (old Jack Jones's granddaughter !) at the rectory, when this dashing lady hardly treated her husband's own aunt with the ordinary civility of a near neighbour. As for me, I wondered that even in Harefield a *Thankee* more or less should be thought worth envying.

Jumping Georgy herself increased my aunt's annoyance. Aunt Jane happened to be sitting in the drawing-room late one afternoon, when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drove up to the Corinthian porch. Aunt Jane saw Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone drive up, and then she saw her drive away. My aunt rang the bell, and found Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had only left cards. When told Mrs Sherbrook was at home, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had said she could not come in, as she was driving with Lady Tutterton.

The following Sunday my aunt would carry her own prayer-book to the churchyard-gate.

Denis must just then have been rather short of people upon whom to practise the fine art of popularity, because that very Sunday afternoon he wrote my aunt a flattering letter, and sent her back Dr MacShaw's 'Sound Sentiments, or Sound Seed sown upon Sound Subjects.' There were marginal notes in my cousin's handwriting. Denis begged Aunt Jane would read his remarks, and let him know if he held sound views.

My aunt thought some of the views sound, but others she thought grievously unsound ; so she took up her pen and stated her opinion at length. By the eighth page she must have sown herself into a growing affection for her only brother's only son, because she told me she finished her letter by hoping that in time Denis would become a useful vessel of righteousness, a measure pressed down and running over with sound doctrine,

so that he and his uncle might walk hand in hand, and thus influence the parish of Harefield, leading souls in the way they should go.

My cousin thereupon wrote back to remind Aunt Jane that a joint apostleship had once turned into enmity the friendship of two great divines. "St Paul," wrote he, "agreed with himself better than he did with St Barnabas."

Aunt Jane thought there was something "rather unsound, Sophy, about what Denis says; but I do not exactly know what it is, so I think I had better write again and send him Dr MacShaw's 'Careful Considerations on Christian Contention in the Catholic Church.' Dr MacShaw always has some new interpretation of an old text, and he thinks St Paul and St Barnabas never fought at all."

"Pray, how does he prove it?" asked I.

"Sophy," said my aunt, "read the book yourself and you will see."

So Aunt Jane cast the 'Careful Considerations' and half-a-dozen sheets more of her own sound doctrine upon the miry waters of Harefield Abbey.

When this correspondence ceased, I perceived my aunt had written herself into charity and good-humour with her nephew, and into forgetfulness of her niece's shortcomings. I therefore fancied she might perhaps be as easily led to preach herself into kindly friendship with other sinners.

I thought it a pity an estrangement should grow up between my uncle and his next of kin. So, waiting till the vision of the tinkling cymbal in the dove-colour dress had faded a little from my aunt's mind, I watched my opportunity, and one evening, when Aunt Jane, as usual, was sighing over the thin end of the wedge at the rectory, I hinted that if Mary were oftener invited to Sherbrook Hall, my aunt might perhaps turn her head so far one way that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone could not turn it the other. Uncle Sherbrook thought this not altogether unlikely. Aunt Jane seemed pleased at the idea.

From this time the Rector and Mary, and even the best behaved of the children, were frequently invited to lunch at the Hall. Aunt Jane corrected the children, and improved the occasion to Mary Sherbrook. Mary took her sermons with admirable good temper—partly because she never listened to them, and never seemed to know they were preached to her own sins.

As to the Rector, my uncle and aunt really enjoyed his society, for he agreed with both of them.

Aunt Jane's subscriptions to the Clothing Club and other parish charities generally passed through the hands of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; but the admirable Catherine being still away collecting in distant parts, my aunt made the Reverend James her parish almoner. Snipkins was only high almoner to the cottages on the estate. The Rector expressed astonishment at the unusual munificence of Aunt Jane's contributions. My aunt said she always gave exactly that same amount. The Rector could not agree with her, though he ceased to contradict her, as it was not in his nature to keep on contradicting a positive and voluble lady.

And so it happened, little by little, that we came to be on good terms with all our neighbours. I felt as if I were living in Arcadia, as that is the only country place one hears of where everybody speaks to everybody else. Now in Harefield even Jumping Georgy said "Thankee!" when you met her; and Aunt Jane stopped the carriage if we met Dr Daly on the road, and she and the doctor were almost pleased to see each other. When we drove on, my aunt invariably said—"Not a bad man at heart, Sophy; it is just the old system which is wrong." What could be more charitable? Aunt Jane also paid Jack Jones the compliment of stopping when we met him, and of saying, "Fine weather for the crops," or "Fine weather for the turnips, Mr Jones." And old Jack was so very respectful that I really believe Aunt Jane went out of her way to meet him, for he made her feel she was a great lady; so she quite enjoyed saying "Fine weather for the turnips" like a queen!

Arcadia! sweet Arcadia! where peace and charity do dwell, why is it you are such a disappointing place? Arcadia, as I have known it, is a land which worries me; for the perspective there, as in a Chinese picture, is all wrong. Small places and small cliques have a perspective of their own, where little things are great, and great ones, however near to us, are little.

This inartistic near-sightedness destroys the poetry of life. How we long to see beyond the narrow valley! for it feels like a prison, and the close air dwarfs our mind.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Poor dear Catherine!" sighed Aunt Jane, holding up an open letter—"poor, dear, excellent, indefatigable creature! I am so glad Gordon-Sherbrook has recovered his health!"

"What?" I asked; "is Mrs Stewart again rejoicing in the Lord over that young man's lung? I thought the lung was cured during the last century."

"Catherine always rejoices in the Lord," said my aunt, looking at me with an air of reproachful severity; "and Gordon-Sherbrook is an admirable young man! Personally, I have seen very little of him, but Catherine is always talking of him and praising him; and from what she tells me, I know he is really a well-brought-up, humble-minded Christian. It would be a privilege to enjoy his intimate acquaintance; and I had hoped to do so this autumn, but Catherine says he will not come to Riverbank with her, for she says he is going abroad instead."

I asked, "For the good of that lung?"

"Sophy, Sophy," exclaimed my aunt quite angrily, "you never seem to think any one does anything from the highest motive! Catherine says Gordon-Sherbrook is going abroad as a means, under Providence, for the furtherance of the good cause in those centres of folly, Popery, infidelity, wickedness, and vice—Paris, and Lyons, and Marseilles; and Catherine says the south of France is even more wicked than the north; so Catherine says Gordon-Sherbrook will spend some time, before joining his regiment at Malta, tract distributing on the—let me see—my aunt looked at Mrs Stewart's letter—"the—Riviera," said she.

"Tract distributing!" cried I—"tract distributing! I should have thought he would have hated his mother's ways! But no doubt she has tatted him into obedience. Poor fellow! when he was ill, she has tatted him into it! and rasped at him! and rasped at him! Heavens! I think I hear her voice!"

Aunt Jane stared at me with the most puzzled face imaginable. "I do not understand you, Sophy," she said—"I do not understand you, for you say such queer things, and you look as if you did not believe a word I said; but just read Catherine's letter yourself, and see if I am always in the wrong."

I glanced over the Scriptural composition. It was edifying: Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's letters are always edifying. "Aunt

Jane, what is all this about the Princess and the purse?" I asked, handing her back the letter.

"Sophy, you never read anything attentively,—never!"

"Really, Aunt Jane, it is all so mixed up with texts which are in Scripture, and texts which ought to be in Scripture, that I cannot make out if I am reading about Mrs Stewart's good works or about the alms of the widows who were widows indeed."

"Well, well, Sophy!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, "I must say I think you are less clever than any one of your age I ever knew!"

My stupidity gave my aunt a glorious opportunity. She had the pleasure of telling me at great length how Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was detained another week north of the Tweed, "because she has collected so much for the Society for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen, that she has twenty-five guineas over after having paid all her own collecting expenses."

I put in—"The labourer is worthy of his hire."

"Why," said Aunt Jane, "that is exactly what Catherine says! so you must have read more of the letter than I thought; and I suppose you saw Catherine says that, by a rule of this particular Society, whoever clears twenty-five guineas for the charity is privileged to present the offering to the Royal patroness in a silk purse provided by the Society; and Catherine says the Princess Louise is coming for the *fête* and *déjeûner*, and if Catherine had cleared fifty guineas, she would be asked to lunch in the same tent with the Princess."

"Ah!" said I, "how Mrs Stewart must regret not having collected—" I corrected myself—"not having cleared fifty guineas for the Promotion of the Christian Sabbath Rest in the Homes of Postmen! She is just the woman to regret it!"

Aunt Jane said Catherine always regretted her insufficiency in good works, "for Catherine always says, much as she has been enabled, under Providence, to labour for the good cause, she feels she does not do all she might for the Lord. And Catherine," added my aunt, "will come to Riverbank immediately after she has presented the purse to the Princess Louise. Now, really," she exclaimed, "I was beginning to wonder if Catherine would stay away for ever! I thought she would, Sophy."

"I, too, have wondered with you on that subject, Aunt Jane; but I did not think the excellent, indefatigable creature would stay away for ever. I never thought so. Never! I

knew, Aunt Jane, she would come back some day to lunch and tatt, and to tatt and dine here when she has not got a cook."

I myself looked forward to the admirable Catherine's return with a hopefulness which I mistook for pleasure. I thought she might bring some new idea to Aunt Jane. But when Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, having duly presented the purse to the Princess Louise, did arrive in the neighbourhood, I knew right well I was not glad to hear her harsh, unsympathetic voice again.

Aunt Jane was delighted to see her Catherine once more. Not so Uncle Sherbrook; yet he was polite to Mrs Stewart, and sent her back to Riverbank in the carriage every night for a week.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had been very industrious north of the Tweed: besides the steeple, she had tatted elaborate cap-lappets for Snipkins, and a pin-cushion cover for Aunt Jane; so when first she came home, I am thankful to say she had used up all her cotton. There was none of that particular sort to be bought in Harefield.

It was not till the eighth or ninth day after her return that she began again to tatt the steeple between the courses at luncheon and dinner. The tatting instantly deranged Uncle Sherbrook's digestion. After dinner he hemmed and hawed, and hoped it was not true Mrs Stewart's brown horse had died last month? He asked this question with a guilty air, and did not look at Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, but turned his head in the contrary direction, and instead of waiting for an answer, remarked to me that the bay mare had not been quite the thing these last few days.

Mrs Stewart inquired, rather sharply, what ailed her? She moved round her chair and fixed an eye on Uncle Sherbrook. Her eye always made him uncomfortable. He took a furtive look at her, and asked me, in an embarrassed manner, if I thought he had marked the glass that morning? I know he would have liked me to suggest he had forgotten it; but Aunt Jane was quite sure Edward had marked the barometer, for Edward always marked the barometer after breakfast on his way to the study.

Mrs Stewart instantly talked about the weather, and talked until Uncle Sherbrook was sufficiently at his ease to give us an account of the late spring, and wet summer, and windy autumn he remembered the year he was ordained. We all knew that year well, though I, for one, was not born at the time. The admirable Catherine took a deep interest in the late spring, wet

summer, and windy autumn which characterised the year my uncle was ordained.

This clever woman had quick sight and tact enough where the tatting was not concerned ; that was the one matter in which she had no tact whatever. It was puzzling to see this one exception to the rule. But her habit of everlasting tatting had been so praised in goody circles and at pious teas, that she was intensely vain of it, and thought it a visible sign of spiritual energy.

During the course of the evening Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart mentioned, quite accidentally as it were, that since her return to Riverbank she had been trying to hear of a good strong mule, of a size to suit her little basket-carriage : she said mules were less voracious, and had better constitutions, than horses or ponies.

Uncle Sherbrook eagerly offered to help Mrs Stewart. He thought Jim Blokes had just the sort of animal she required. Mrs Stewart thanked Uncle Sherbrook, but said Jim Blokes would be asking some ridiculous price for the creature. "Now," she exclaimed, "I should not object to a nice little bargain. I am no coward myself, and the farmers' wives are a pack of geese. Supposing a mule backed into a ditch with one of them, and kept the good woman in mortal terror and in the ditch for an hour or two, why, the animal might be sold for a mere song next day."

Aunt Jane expressed intense horror at the bare notion of a mule backing into a ditch with anybody. Her dear Catherine reassured her by saying horses were always taking fright, running away, and jumping over precipices ; while the worst sins she had ever known brought against a mule were a few sly kicks, or some tricks of stopping on a road or backing into a hedge : "and what is that ?" said she.

"A mere nothing !" I remarked ; "you would just sit tatting in the ditch."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart spoke of the mule in the most business-like, self-possessed manner, as if she knew exactly what she wanted, and had made up her mind on the subject a month ago. I wondered if this were really so. I watched Mrs Stewart's dark eyes with curiosity. Her restless eyes are the only part of her face where the expression habitually changes. There are times when her eyes will belie her words, and almost betray her thoughts. Her eager hungry nostrils and spare lips rarely change, for they are fixed by hard determined lines — lines which close in at the

corners of the mouth with a covetous grasp. If ever the strong lines relax, it is by an effort—it seems to be by Mrs Stewart's own conscious effort.

“Sophy!” exclaimed the admirable Catherine, “don't stare at me like that! You are getting quite a disagreeable trick of staring. Pick up my shuttle, and look for your aunt's scissors, and get a card and wind that cotton off the back of that chair.” I thought in my own mind the mule was a sudden inspiration of genius.

No inspiration could have pleased Uncle Sherbrook better. The very next day he heard of a mule who had a fancy for stopping in a particular spot on a particular road, two miles from the railway station at the other side of Harefield. Whenever the mule stopped, Mrs Jennings's milk missed the early London train. The mule was to be had a bargain. “You can always avoid that particular bit of road, Mrs Stewart,” said my uncle; “the mule is in good condition; and if you take him out cool, and bring him in cool, and don't canter him up every hill, he may last your lifetime.”

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart bought the mule. Mrs Stewart was not out of pocket by her purchase: six days in the seven she drove over from Riverbank before luncheon, with old Dan seated on the back seat of the little carriage. The mule had two feeds of oats, and old Dan dined and supped. Snipkins permitted this hospitality, and received Dan at her own table. Mrs Stewart was on terms of cordial intimacy with the lady's-maid.

My uncle showed forbearance towards the tatting, now the bay mare was allowed to cough quietly in her warm stable at night. Besides, Mrs Stewart laid herself out to please Uncle Sherbrook in a way she had never done before: she remembered the weather for the last thirty years, and asked no questions about Jones or Boggle.

I was much struck by the sudden, extraordinary interest the best of women appeared to take in Uncle Sherbrook. She cross-examined me about the state of his health during her absence, remarking that a break-up of constitution was always to be expected in a man of seventy, no matter how well he might seem to wear.

I noticed, however, that she thought it more prudent not to discuss the constitution of a man of seventy with Aunt Jane. She talked solely on the subject she happened just then to have upon her nerves. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart always had some one subject on her nerves which she would talk over by the hour with Aunt Jane. At first, after her return, the one subject she

never dropped was Mineham, and the urgent necessity of "dear Mrs Sherbrook's" paying an immediate visit to Lady Arabella Scott. - "Now, my dear Mrs Sherbrook," she would say, "you must, you must coax Mr Sherbrook to let us have the carriage the first really fine day. I hear the Elmer-Elmers are coming to Mineham early next week. Snipkins heard it in the village—did not you hear it?" She asked me if I had heard the report. She was very anxious to know the truth of this important matter, and frequently exclaimed, with an air of piety and mystery, that Providence was always making a way and a means for those who laboured in the Lord's vineyard. Not being one of the elect, I was at a loss to imagine how Mineham and the Lord's vineyard could be connected together. If Lady Arabella's appearance suggested any vineyard at all to one's mind, it was Naboth's, and not the Lord's.

Uncle Sherbrook got into such good-humour when Mrs Stewart bought her mule, that there really was but little difficulty in persuading him the precious horses might be driven to Mineham and back without injury.

So Aunt Jane and her Catherine drove off to Mineham together.

They came home from their visit in high spirits. Next morning, on the back avenue, I had a lengthy account from Aunt Jane of what she had said, and Catherine had said, and the Elmer-Elmers had said, and Lady Arabella had said. My aunt said that owing to her long drive all alone with Catherine she herself felt spiritually refreshed. "Every opportunity is a golden one to Catherine! her one talent becomes ten talents! and wherever her influence is felt, the talents intrusted to others are not permitted to lie idle." These parables were a little difficult to interpret at first, but I soon picked up their meaning. I gathered the Elmer-Elmers had proved "a field" for Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's energies. The indefatigable creature had persuaded Lady Arabella to persuade her guests to let Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart arrange, "under Providence," said Aunt Jane, "a little concert for the benefit of the Society for the Promotion of Protestant Principles amongst the French Infidels. No!" cried my aunt, correcting herself—"not that; I am mistaken! I forgot. I remember, Catherine made up her mind the concert is to be given in aid of the Home for Homeless and Outcast Dogs!"

"Dogs!" cried I—"dogs, Aunt Jane! what on earth could make you say French infidels when you meant dogs?"

"A very natural mistake!" exclaimed my aunt, warmly—"a

very natural mistake, Sophy! for I am sure Catherine was quite undecided all the way from here to Mineham. You don't understand, Sophy, because you never do seem to understand about anything; but Catherine thought she would not realise more than £20 in aid of the Promotion of Protestant Principles among the French Infidels. She has so often collected for that Society that she says her friends are tired of it, and might not take the concert tickets; and Catherine has never yet collected for the Home for those poor homeless, outcast dogs. Never! so with what she intends to collect the next time she goes upon one of her tours, she hopes she may clear fifty guineas for the charity if Miss Elmer-Elmer will sing for it, and the dear kind Baron von Klammerhammer; and Catherine means to get Lord Studhorsey to sing if she can find his address."

"Fifty guineas!" cried I; "then Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart will lunch in the Home with the dogs and the Princess Louise!"

"No," replied my aunt; "not with the Princess Louise—with Princess Christian. They are going to get Princess Christian to be patroness of this Society, and I am sure you have heard Catherine say so. But you never listen, Sophy! and if you did hear, you would not understand."

"Oh! but I do understand Mrs Stewart's indecision. Indeed I do, Aunt Jane. I understand perfectly," said I, "why your admirable Catherine finally chose the dogs, and did not choose the infidels. I understand it all perfectly—perfectly, Aunt Jane!"

Not long after this conversation, Aunt Jane told me she had received an invitation from Lady Arabella for the three last days of the following week. "I think your uncle will go," she said; "and I am going, and Catherine is certainly coming with me."

I was enchanted to find my aunt, being happily convinced she felt "poor dear Sophia's death" more than I did, had no notion of refusing the blessed invitation.

The idea that I should have three whole days of perfect liberty filled me with intense delight.

The end of next week! Why, we were nearly there already! No time to settle anything! Aunt Jane had to telegraph to Madame Julie Browne for a new gown—"very deep mourning, but dressy," said the telegram; "evening body, with plenty of jet."

At the very last moment, to my unspeakable disappointment,

Uncle Sherbrook declared he would not go to Mineham. What did he care for concerts? He would stay at home and take care of Sophy; he had also important business to transact. Aunt Jane could tell Lady Arabella he had very important business.

I think, when it came to the point, Uncle Sherbrook fought shy of the tatting, for it was quite clear Mrs Stewart did not intend taking the mule to Mineham. The mule was all very well just about Harefield, where the superior person was known. But she was not so generally known at the other side of the county; therefore a certain amount of style became necessary to keep up her dignity in distant parts. She proposed tatting with her face to the horses in Uncle Sherbrook's close carriage. My uncle would have been tatted at for nine long miles, he sitting backwards on the uncomfortable seat I so well know—a seat apparently designed for an infantine body with no legs.

Aunt Jane nearly shed tears in bidding her dear Edward good-bye. She gave me her blessing and much sound advice. The best of women joined in the good advice. Snipkins was in her glory: she wore Mrs Stewart's tatted lappets, "her Christian lady's precious gift," fastened on to her bonnet and pinned over the strings under her chin.

The carriage had hardly driven from the door, when Uncle Sherbrook called me into his study. And there I may say I stayed till Aunt Jane came home again! My uncle read me no end of leases, and a good deal of the old correspondence about that right-of-way. When he went out walking, he took me over that right-of-way path and explained the legal proceedings of the ten happiest years of his life. He could talk to me at his ease of Mr Jones's able handling of the case,—he dared not do so to Aunt Jane.

My silence must have seemed very learned to Uncle Sherbrook, because he was much pleased with me. Towards the end of our companionship in the study, he even read me his last-made will. He always drew up his own wills, and was very proud of being able to make them without the help of an attorney, for he said this was a subject on which he preferred consulting neither Jones nor Boggle.

I gathered from the will, that Edward-Brewen-Stewart-Sherbrook, of Sherbrook Hall, in the county of Dullshire, Esquire, gave, devised, and bequeathed most of his landed property to his cousin the Reverend James Brewen Sherbrook, clerk in holy orders; that he left Sherbrook Hall to his wife, Jane-Selina-Harriet-Barbara Sherbrook, for her lifetime, and to his afore-

said cousin James Brewen Sherbrook, his heirs and assigns (those were the very words), upon her decease; and that the said testator made his aforesaid wife, Jane-Selina-Harriet-Barbara Sherbrook, residuary legatee, and left her the interest of £30,000 besides during her life.

When my uncle had read so far, he rolled up the paper and held it closed in his hand. He leant back in his arm-chair and looked at me. I feared I might have to undergo an examination, and I had only paid a sort of general attention to the long-winded document. "Sophy," said my uncle, scanning me solemnly, "what do you think of that will?"

"I . . . well, Uncle Sherbrook, I suppose it is as interesting as that horridly particular, pedantic, *aforesaid* kind of language will permit."

"Sophy," exclaimed my uncle, with a look of undisguised amazement—"Sophy, if there is a meaning in what you say, I do not grasp it; and I perceive you have not grasped mine."

Uncle Sherbrook rose and locked up the will in its own box, and locked that box inside another, and that other in the biggest of the iron safes. When he had done all this, he turned to me with a kind expression, almost with a smile, on his solemn face. "Child," said he, gently, "it is strange you should not ask upon whom I have settled the £30,000 at your aunt's death."

On Jones and Boggle! thought I; but I said nothing, as I did not want to broach the inexhaustible subject of the two attorneys. I wanted to get out of the fusty study before the day was quite over and the sun had set. I was in a great hurry for Uncle Sherbrook to come out, as every moment I dreaded to see him produce another will. I imagined the study to be full of the aforesaid documents.

It was not till long, long afterwards, that it struck me Uncle Sherbrook had intended hinting to me I was to have £30,000 at Aunt Jane's death. Then it was not for many a long day that I ever thought of Uncle Sherbrook's will or wills, except as a pleasant pastime for him and Aunt Jane.

My onerous legal duties had one most unexpected interruption—Jumping Georgy paid me a visit!

"I have come," cried she, in a burst of volubility which amazed me—"I have come to hear all about this musical affair at Mineham, and to ask what charity it is by way of being for?"

"For the Home," I answered, "for Outcast and Homeless Dogs."

I expected a short *Thankee* in reply. I was astounded by a

speech, spoken hurriedly with the energy of real annoyance. "When Lady Arabella wants to give a party," said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, "she always hunts up some queer charitable or semi-religious excuse for it. I should like to know," she exclaimed—"I should very much like to know, why Lady Arabella can't give a party because she is fond of society and wants to get invitations in return, just like any one else? But, you see, it costs money to entertain, and you must have young men for the ladies if you have not piety. Lady Arabella can't get the men; for do what she will, David Scott won't ask them: besides, she says her fortune cannot stand regular champagne-dinners, so she goes in for the cheap and charitable, and does not always pay for her own ices."

"She merely sends in the bill to the Blacks, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone."

"Well, well! I do wonder people go to her! I must say I do wonder. But they would go anywhere for anything in this county. Drive any distance to hear any sort of screech-owl! The idea of importing those Elmers from town! As if there was no musical talent in Dullshire! But Dullshire people," added Jumping Georgy, hotly, "are a wretched set of ignoramuses, and don't know anything of art. It is screeching that tells with them! Mere voice! They care for nothing but plenty of wind in a person's lungs."

"That is a very odd mistake, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I; "for I thought everybody knew our best amateurs have a great deal of genius, but very little voice. I have always heard, the only thing a singer does not want nowadays is a voice." The Drill-sergeant overlooked me with her eye-glass. The eye-glass awed me, and I held my tongue.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has no power of repartee. She is one of those Englishwomen who feel dreadfully uncomfortable if they suspect you mean more than you say, and yet are never sure if you do or do not. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's eye-glass grew very fidgety, going up to her eye and coming down again. The silence was getting awkward.

At length Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone asked abruptly, in an angry sort of manner, "Are they to have nothing but *solfeggi* at Mineham? Any one else going to sing?"

"Yes; Mrs Clerico," I said,—"the archdeacon's wife, you know."

"I know? Thankee! I do know. I—I should rather think I did know Mrs Clerico!"

"She is to take a part in a trio and quartette."

"Is it possible," cried Jumping Georgy—"is it possible Lady Arabella has imported that woman also?"

"I rather think," I replied, "Mrs Clerico is the lady who has imported herself. I think Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart said Mrs Clerico, hearing a rumour of this concert, wrote to say she would be delighted to sing for the dogs, if Lady Arabella liked to have her."

"Impudent woman!" exclaimed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone,— "the most impudent woman I ever met in my life; and with as much voice as a tin kettle! Teaching does *her* no good. You can't drum a true note into her. You may go over a passage twenty times, and think you have got her right at last; but off she will set, and run up a scale, with a scream at the end that puts your teeth on edge. And then, if you are clapped, she will declare the clapping is all for her, and wonder how you manage to sing sharp! Never saw such a vain, ambitious person—never! She would sing anything. She has got into our *Sam*—I'm sure I can't tell how; so she drags the arch-deacon up to town in the spring, and says it is for the May meetings. There I find her stuck by my side at all our practices; and—can you believe it?—she is a woman with a following! If there is a part to be taken, there are a whole set of ladies always pushing Mrs Clerico forward: 'Oh, Mrs Clerico, you must sing that!' 'Mrs Clerico, it is just suited to *your* voice;' 'Mrs Clerico will take a first;' 'Mrs Clerico will take anything;' 'Now, dear Mrs Clerico,—dear Mrs Clerico, do sing, Mrs Clerico.' Clerico, Clerico! I have had 'Clerico' dinned into me till I am sick of the name! The idea of that woman having a following!—a set of officious busybodies who actually bothered, and bothered, and bothered until they bothered me into taking a second to Mrs Clerico's first. I am sure I did not want to sing a duet with the woman at all: I knew she would break down to a dead certainty, though I drummed, and drummed, and drummed the notes into her. But what can you drum into a tin kettle? I went over the thing fifty times with her, for there were three bars which never would come right. She heard they were wrong, and said it was most extraordinary we never got them right. I said I was not surprised. She suggested I had better practise the high notes alone; 'and then,' said she, 'we might try them together again, and get those bars right!' But I knew very well, in my own mind, whose high notes would never come right; and they never did come right. When we sang at the concert, Mrs Clerico's high notes spoilt the duet. I turned my

back upon her with disgust"—Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone turned her shoulder as she spoke—"I turned my back upon her with disgust! She was putting in for an *encore*, but I walked to my place, and there I sat, and let her beckon, and pretended not to see her." Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone shook her head, with a most determined look, and dropped her eyelids, as if resolved never again to see the *woman with a following*. "But now," exclaimed Jumping Georgy, springing up from her chair and standing at full height before me,—"now, after this horrid *fiasco* of hers, what do you suppose she had the impudence to say to me? I did not meet her again that year,—I never saw her till the following season, when she spied me one day at an afternoon tea, and walked right across the room towards me. I had my glass up, so I saw her coming. I put it down, and looked the other way; but she would make me know her. 'I think we have the pleasure of each other's acquaintance,' said she. 'By the by, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, when last we met, you were trying to catch some high notes; have you been trying to catch them ever since?' She meant," continued Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone—as if the meaning were not clear enough—"she meant it was I who went wrong in the duet, and might practise for ever and not be right! I came to the conclusion she must mean that, and could mean nothing else. Rigardy thinks so too, and cuts Mrs Clerico, no matter where he meets her."

The excitement and volubility of Jumping Georgy astonished and amused me. The impudence of the "woman with a following" was delightful. I laughed so heartily that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, who had never seen me laugh before, put up her eye-glass, put it down again, grew nervous, turned red, and looked as if she thought I might be laughing at her. She had been telling her story standing over me. When I laughed, she went back to her chair, stepping very high. Jumping Georgy's impulsive, abrupt feelings have a way of showing themselves in all her movements. Her discomfort and annoyance seek expression in every limb, and even work themselves into the tail of her dress; they rustle and twist in her skirt. My cousin's wife sat with her eye-glass fixed permanently upon me. The eye-glass sobered me. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was silent; she did not seem to have another word to say.

I wondered if she were in the habit of catching high notes with the Baron von Klammerhammer's eye-glass and tiptoes. I remembered once hearing her sing with them, so I thought

I should like to know the Drill-sergeant's opinion of the distinguished foreigner. I thought the opinion any one amateur singer held of another must be worth hearing.

"Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I, "the Baron von Klammerhammer is to sing with Miss Elmer-Elmer and Mrs Clerico."

She softened at *Mein Herr von Klammerhammer's* name. "The Baron! poor dear old creature! I only do wonder how he can keep on singing with that Miss Elmer—for he really does know how to sing. The Baron has method," continued the Drill-sergeant, in a tone of decision—"he has method. He brings out his voice from the right place."

"A pity he has so little of it left in the right place, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! He will soon have to stand on his tiptoes and look for it with his eye-glass in the wrong one."

"I don't know what you mean, Sophy"—every one calls me Sophy—"I don't know what you mean; but I do know I would rather sing with the Baron than with any one in town. He is a perfectly tractable man—perfectly, and does not drown your voice with his own shakes and flourishes, like that conceited Reginald Meltem. The Baron is an artist—a perfect artist. Not like Lord Studhorsey, who sings to himself, and expects you to sing to him also."

"By the way, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, they are to have his little lordship at Mineham: he is to sing with himself, and with Miss Elmer-Elmer too."

"Well, I do declare! How that Mrs Elmer does run after him! She is set upon catching him for Miss Ermyntrude."

"It was not Mrs Elmer-Elmer," I said; "it was Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart who caught Lord Studhorsey. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart has the sole management of the concert and the singers."

"Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart!" repeated Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone in astonishment. "Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart! Why, she does not know one tune from another. How on earth can she undertake to organise a concert?"

I answered that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would undertake to organise anything, in this world or the next.

"It is Maria Warbattle Lady Arabella ought to have had," insisted the Drill-sergeant, as if there could not be a doubt on the subject. "Maria is perfectly invaluable: she can manage everything, and accompany every one, and never wants to sing herself. Had Lady Arabella consulted me, I should have taken over Maria Warbattle to Mineham. We could have arranged everything, and have imported no one. The idea of importing a pack of strangers! Positive insult to the county!"

A wicked imp tempted me, and I said, "Although you are not taking part in the concert, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, I presume you and Miss Warbattle will drive over to Mineham to-morrow, for the afternoon, just to hear what sort of *fiasco* they all make of the affair?"

"Not a step of the way shall we go," cried the Drill-sergeant, reddening. She jumped up from her chair; the chair fell back with a rattle. "Not a step of the way shall we go. Never was more astounded than by Lady Arabella's gaucheness. The notion of asking me to take guinea tickets to hear that Miss Elmer sing *solfeggi*!"

The notion was nearly too much for my gravity, so I was delighted to hear Jumping Georgy bid me a sudden, abrupt good-bye.

"Remember me to Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I.

"Thankee!" said she.

"How terrible," I exclaimed, when my visitor was half-way down the avenue,—"how terrible a misfortune it is to be a woman without a following!"

On my return to the solemn study, Uncle Sherbrook appeared to be rather shocked at the lively, laughing look of me. The fact is, I had spent a very pleasant half-hour with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone: she had amused me, and I was unaccustomed to be amused.

To my surprise, I felt I liked Jumping Georgy,—there was so much human nature about her. Her feelings were undisguised, and she did not wrap up her faults in texts of Scripture.

CHAPTER XXIII.

In due time Thomas told Snipkins, Snipkins told Aunt Jane, and Aunt Jane told Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, that Thomas had told Snipkins "the master and Miss Sophy had lived in the study during the mistress's absence."

George and Thomas also told Snipkins, who told Aunt Jane, who told Mrs Stewart, that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had paid me a long visit the very day my aunt left home.

These two bits of news displeased the admirable Catherine. She was more particularly put out at hearing Thomas said the

master and Miss Sophy had lived in the study during the mistress's absence.

Mrs Stewart asked me if, by any chance, Uncle Sherbrook had read me his will? I said he had, but firmly refused to tell her what was in it. I knew she could not bear to think the Reverend James might be my uncle's heir.

From this time forth I discovered Mrs Stewart tried to make Aunt Jane even more jealous of me than she was by nature. My aunt was a sieve through whom all things filtered. "Do you know, Sophy, Catherine thinks you quite a dangerous person; and she says . . ." and then I had the full benefit of Catherine's private opinion of me. These confidential communications amused and enlightened me, like the *asides* in a play. If I had not had a clue to the plot, Mrs Stewart's civility would have puzzled me. To become dangerous in some people's eyes, is to seem of a certain importance. Never before had I known the admirable Catherine so polite.

Her politeness must have cost her a great effort, for she had many irritations on her nerves. She discovered that during her collecting tour and attendance on Gordon-Sherbrook's lung, my aunt and uncle had managed to fall into good fellowship with their neighbours. When Mrs Stewart started northwards, the Rector had behaved in a very rude manner: he had quite disgraced himself by a scandalous exhibition of temper; he was a cross, censorious, violent man, and a hypocrite; while his wife was the weak and overdressed mother of his badly brought-up children—and worse, the granddaughter of Jack Jones.

Not long after Mrs Stewart's return south, the Rector came uninvited to luncheon, and brought Mary and the two elder boys with him. We were all on the best of terms. What a sight for the admirable Catherine's eyes! What a worry for her jealous temper! How had this great change taken place? When James, and Mary, and the boys walked into the dining-room, Mrs Stewart cast a look upon me which seemed to ask, was this my doing?

So, little by little, with one jealous worry and another, and more especially on finding Aunt Jane had given her village subscriptions to the Rector, Mrs Stewart took to tatting the steeple in a frenzy. Her nervous fingers made one restless; her voice, raised above and penetrating beyond the click of her shuttle, scraped one's nerves; and then that voice was always jarring on some one string, scratching a hymn on catgut. No matter how unchristian the mischief-making, it was sure to be set in some pious key. When the subject harped upon was in itself of a religious nature, the best of women had great scope for

damning her neighbour charitably. When Mrs Stewart scraped day by day upon the doctrine and duties of a clergyman of the evangelical Church of England, it was a hymn edifying to Aunt Jane that she scratched upon this one everlasting string. The "thin end of the wedge" has always been a grating subject to my temper, principally from the way it seems to have of boring eternally. There are imaginations which, having once seized upon that wedge, can give the thin end no rest, nor it them.

Aunt Jane was at home in any one groove of mind. She felt no disgust at hearing Mrs Stewart each day discuss the Rector and his wife, his children, and the thin end of the wedge; on the contrary, the regular recurrence of the topic became a habit, and, therefore, an expected pleasure to her vacant mind. It suited Aunt Jane to have ideas and words laid down flat before her with a gate at the end, like her own avenues, in order that she might pace backwards and forwards upon them, taking about the same number of turns each day.

But my aunt, good, blind soul! is kind at heart, so the pleasure of the habit would not have lasted could she have seen the ruin of the poor clergyman's prospects which lay maliciously rolled-up in the admirable Catherine's texts of Scripture and religious zeal and anxiety for the Sherbrooks' spiritual welfare.

I have not patience to follow, day by day, the growth of prejudice in Aunt Jane's mind, and the hourly labour of Mrs Stewart in a vineyard which was not the Lord's. It irritates me to write about what irritated me to feel. Many of the small miseries and tiffs, and drawn-out insignificant botherations, I have already described in this my trivial life, have greatly teased my pen; but really, the spun-out details of Mrs Stewart's daily intrigues worry its impatience beyond endurance, so that it cannot write of them. It is enough to say that, after six months' slow, pettifogging perseverance, my aunt was thoroughly prejudiced by Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart against the poor Rector and his wife and children.

It is not difficult to persuade an elderly lady who has completely forgotten her own youth, that the old Adam has been born again, and is growing up amongst a set of tree-climbing children with high spirits; and it was an easy matter to find fault with Mary Sherbrook, for she happened to be the wrong person in the wrong place. Yet had she been in the right place, she was just the sort of woman half the world admires—pretty, delicate, soft, asking sympathy from all men and from most women. Fancy her with plenty of money, efficient servants,

clever governesses,—a dear, sweet creature, so well-dressed. “Goes to the best dressmakers, and always has stockings, gloves, and bonnet to match her gown. Such nice taste, you know! such a charming eye for knick-knacks and old china! Her own room quite a *bijou!* china plates all over the walls, and a knot of pink ribbons to every plate and picture. The freshest curtains, the most lovely pink satin coverlet to her bed, and a pink satin dressing-gown trimmed with real lace!” I think I hear her lady friends say, “She never wears any but real lace,” as if to wear real lace were the highest sort of virtue!

I can imagine Mary Sherbrook in pink satin and real lace, and her girls and boys in fancy costume, all with their hair cut short before and in long curls behind—the big boys “just like pictures, you know! Such beautiful hair! quite interesting children! And the governess never lets them be in the way.” And I can also hear the charming little lady praised to the skies.

Circumstances had not made Mary Sherbrook, but nature had; and talent or strength of character is required to make people what nature did not make them: amiable incapacity, very blind and a little vain, must die as it was born, and from no fault of its own.

Harefield considered Mary Sherbrook to be one of those pretty dears whom Providence had clearly intended for a strong-minded, efficient husband. It is true, the Reverend James’s mother-in-law declared Providence had made her daughter’s match; but Harefield believed Providence had nothing to say to it, and the Rector’s mother-in-law a great deal. I once heard Aunt Jane wonder “if really, after all, Catherine, Providence did intend James to marry another sort of wife; because why, then, did James marry Mary?”—and Mrs Stewart reply, with intense conviction, “Mrs Sherbrook, even Providence can be outwitted by a matchmaking mother!” I never forgot this queer answer: it was an odd remark for a lady mixing amongst the saints of this world who are the salt thereof, and not, I had thought, the intriguing mothers thereof. But what did I know of the pious ladies who get up bazaars solely for the benefit of the Blacks? It is true I did not know them, and Mrs Stewart did.

I began, like the rest of Harefield, by being quite sure Providence had intended Mary for a strong-minded husband; I ended by thinking Providence had perhaps more to say to the match than Harefield would allow. Mary Sherbrook is just the woman who might tease to death a clear-headed, strong-willed

husband ; the man would expect her to lean entirely on his strength. Now, though Mary is ever seeking protection, she only puts one hand in yours, and, like the child she is, keeps the other free to play with her favourite toy. Mary leans on your arm, but turns her eyes and thoughts upon the gown she holds up in one hand. Caring for her pretty dress, seeing only her pretty dress, she likes to take her time, and would not like to run at a rough husband's pace. When hurried, such women cry, and think the man a monster, although his haste may be towards great things, and his time their bread. If women like Mary cry, they seem to think their tears have put them in the right — as if you could weep away reason and good sense ! Their tears do not really melt these fine hard rocks : but they think they do—they feel as if they did ; and their feeling is their obstinate conviction, and their obstinacy is a dull dead weight, not to be fought with or pricked into life,—a lump of lead strong men are maddened to find they cannot drag along.

There is a sort of woman all softness and tears, who will not refuse to walk with you on the muddy road she mildly hates, yet she will drag upon your arm and weigh you down till night falls, and you are driven to seek rest in a hovel by the way. Her dulled eyes can never see the goal you fain would reach.

Thinking thus—for there were odd moments on the back avenue when I could think—I grew to believe, although doubtless there are weak women made especially for strong men, and strong wives for weak husbands, that yet again there are weak women for weak men, as there are strong men to whom strength is a necessity, because leaning, dragging, unyielding weakness maddens them. So I came to think that in the Rector's marriage, perhaps (for once !) an intriguing mother was not permitted to upset the designs of Providence.

What enraged the ordering, ever-arranging Mrs Stewart with Mary Sherbrook, was not that she found the doll soft, but that there were places where your thumb made no impression on the wax. If you got Mary into your hands, she would take up your "views," she would talk like you, she would even walk like you ; but preach to her for ever, and she would buy pretty things without money, and would not give up one yard of pink ribbon for the education of her boys. Maybe the boys were a little backward ; but they really did not want to go to school as soon as other children, for they were certainly clever, and Mary was quite sure they would do well in life. Reason with her, she would cry ; but no tears could ever melt the wax in that spot.

Mrs Stewart did not advise Aunt Jane to ask Uncle Sherbrook to educate the elder boys at his own expense. It was more for her own interest that she should rasp for ever on Mary's one untunable string, until she deceived Aunt Jane's ear, and persuaded her the whole instrument was false. The admirable Catherine deafened her dear Mrs Sherbrook with one sound, on the same principle that she engrossed her sight by holding up the thin end of the wedge right before her eyes, thus shutting out the Rector's natural shape till Aunt Jane could only see that wedge, and not at all the human being, the good clergyman, the needy hard-working man, her husband's rightful heir and her own kind friend.

Slow as the Rector was to notice neglect or take offence, he did at length perceive that he and his wife and children were no longer very welcome at Sherbrook Hall. From a remark which filtered through Mrs Stewart's sieve to me, I rather imagine the best of women simplified matters by giving James and Mary a hint to stay away: half a hint would keep a delicate gentleman like the Rector at a distance.

Mrs Stewart managed there should be neither quarrel nor intimacy between the rectory and the Hall. When Aunt Jane would think she really ought to go and visit Mary, the admirable Catherine would put off the visit, or else accompany my aunt herself. If the passive Mary's long-suffering silence happened to make a good impression upon Aunt Jane in Mrs Stewart's presence, the best of women perceived it instantly, and talked it and tattled it away.

As for me, I found, to my intense disgust, that, no matter what I did or said in the poor Sherbrooks' favour, I only increased my aunt's prejudice, so entirely had Mrs Stewart and Snipkins convinced her that Sophy was always in the wrong, though Sophy always thought everybody else in the wrong.

"Aunt Jane, Aunt Jane," I said, "why do you let yourself drift into a state of prejudice against James and Mary Sherbrook? They have never been unkind relations to you. Make sure you have good reason to turn an old friendship into enmity, and at least do not change without knowing you are changing, and wherefore." My aunt seemed to think I had accused her of a great sin.

"Change!" she exclaimed, with lively indignation; "I never change to any one, and you know that perfectly well, Sophy; but you always accuse me of everything; and you even think I walk over the flower-beds, and you say I made the damp mound in the garden, though your uncle made it,

and though it gives me my death of cold ; but you always like arguing, and your poor dear mother liked it ; so argue to your heart's content, for I won't argue any more."

The natural effect of this vague, indefinite estrangement with the rectory, was to throw Mary Sherbrook entirely into the determined hands of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and to make Mary's "views" and worsted-work be taken more than ever after the Drill-sergeant's own pattern.

Could Aunt Jane have reflected, she would have seen her conduct must inevitably drive the Reverend James to agree more and more with the female rector and the Right Reverend Rigardy-Wrenstone. It was in the man's nature to agree with some one.

Great changes rarely take place in twenty-four hours. If you open your eyes each morning and see just a little change to-day and just a little to-morrow, nothing surprises you at the end of six months. But if you sleep for half a year, and then open your eyes, you are astounded at the great change which stares you, like unlocked-for treason, in the face.

Mrs Stewart, for reasons best known to herself, had managed that Aunt Jane should not be much in the study or otherwise alone with Uncle Sherbrook, so my aunt had had very little opportunity of putting ideas drop by drop into her husband's head. "Dear Edward" was absorbed in his own affairs : his thoughts were with Jones and Boggle. He never really listened to his wife ; and it was only when they were a great deal together, that the constant repetition of one subject caught his attention. As a rule, he was quite content her general remarks should be unintelligible to him ; he asked for no explanation, because he dreaded the length and obscurity of the answer. He would say to me—"Your aunt is fond of talking ; listen to her, Sophy. I am engaged upon important business."

When the Rigardy-Wrenstones were the officiating clergy of Harefield, my uncle had himself perceived the thin end of the wedge poking into the parish. But he had warned James. Whenever James and Mary came to luncheon, my uncle had found James ready to agree with all his own moderate views, and Mary had never contradicted him in her life. No wonder Uncle Sherbrook felt theologically safe ! He sat in his study, wrote to his attorney and to my attorney, and did not let the thin end of the wedge at the rectory trouble his preoccupied brain. He noticed nothing.

Once, only once, did I hear him say he was surprised James and Mary never came to luncheon now. My lips were open, but

Mrs Stewart cut the words from me with her sharp tongue, and cleverly launched Aunt Jane into vagueness and the thin end of the wedge. As my aunt was unintelligible without a clue, and very voluble, my uncle said he could not loiter any longer on the front avenue, for he had business with a man at the other end of the village.

Conceive, then, Uncle Sherbrook's feelings, when, having slept a good half-year, awaking, he looked up one day and came face to face with the Rector in a coat as long as Noah's of the wooden ark—a coat with the mark of the Beast on it—and a waistcoat the imagination could button to the Pope's own chin!

My uncle's puzzled amazement opened his ears to his wife's rigmaroles, and made him willing to hear Mrs Stewart's opinion of James's Ritualistic uniform. The admirable Catherine had her say and sowed her own seed with an air of aggrieved piety. Had it not been for Mrs Stewart and Aunt Jane, Uncle Sherbrook would have gone straight off to the rectory. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were away; so I am sure that, before long, that stumbling-block, the Ritualistic coat, would have been sent back to the Pope. I am certain the best of women's clear dark eyes perceived this possibility; so she cleverly persuaded my uncle to avoid the rectory, and leave to his own devices a man who had deceived him—for what else had James Sherbrook done? Had he not always agreed with my uncle? Yet, while he appeared to agree, he must in reality have disagreed with him. Such treason wounded my uncle, for he had liked his cousin and had trusted him. The clever Catherine had that sort of penetration which divines the injured place: by pressing on that spot, she could make it an open wound. She first showed Uncle Sherbrook where James's conduct had hurt him, and then made that hurt into a sore.

Uncle Sherbrook sought no interview with his cousin, but avoided him. So the Rector wore the long coat, never suspecting his old friend considered the Pope to be his tailor.

The ordinary Harefield Christian saw no sudden change in the services of the parish church or in the doctrine of the Rector. But from the moment the clergyman's coat lengthened, the Sherbrooks, being led by the orthodox Catherine, saw the thick end of the wedge growing thicker every Sunday. I did not see it. Then, it is true, when I went to church, I was much occupied in trying to say my prayers. I said them whenever I could. I say, whenever I could, because I sat next Aunt Jane in the square pew, and her behaviour was a constant interrup-

tion. She repeated every word of the service and lessons in my ear; she shook her head; she said the responses very slowly and in a loud voice, and finished her verse of the Psalms during the clergyman's. Not unfrequently my aunt would read the prayers with the Rector in a loud undertone, putting strong emphasis where he put none. In the responses, her voice clashed with the clerk's, for she never would follow old Tom. Then, during the sermon, if the doctrine were unsound, she groaned; if sound, she sighed.

Each Sabbath, Aunt Jane groaned more and more: by the kind help of Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart, the marks of the Beast grew clearer and clearer. At length, on Easter Sunday, the Beast himself became visible in the elaborate decorations of the church. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had appeared in Harefield, and had decorated the altar and the church to her own satisfaction; and, indeed, to Mary Sherbrook's also, for Mary is exactly the kind of woman to whom church millinery must ever be a delight—a sort of sanctification of her own millinery instincts! I said so to Aunt Jane, and said it was nature, and not solely Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, who had made Mary thus; but I only convinced my aunt that no one could be more unsound than Sophy—Sophy's views of everything were always dreadful; "and really, Sophy, you shock me! because you seem to take Mary's part, although you heard Catherine telling me yesterday that Mary was delighted with James's coat, and was not a bit grieved about it, but thought it became James, and made him look taller; and indeed, Catherine says, when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone ordered it, she and Mary gave James no peace till he wore it every day; and you know all this, Sophy, and still you dare to defend Mary."

"I do not defend," said I, "but I explain. Aunt Jane, Mary likes what she has been created to like. It is the actual coat, and no particular dogma or doctrine she admires. She would like to see her husband in a picturesque hat, with a cardinal's tassels falling over the brim; and she would like him to wear a cassock, and purple stockings, and shoe-buckles; and she would put a broad sash round his waist, and black bands with white edges round his neck; and she would tonsure the crown of his head, and have him look an ascetic priest with big eyes."

A cry of horror from Aunt Jane told me I was following my imagination too far. I had some difficulty in reassuring my aunt, and getting her to believe she might go to church the following Sunday and not see the appalling figure I had described. But, to my great surprise, I found Aunt Jane was

doubtful about going to Harefield Church at all next Sabbath. "If the weather looks showery, we may go there," said she.

"Dear me, Aunt Jane!" I exclaimed, "it is odd to be more religious in wet weather than in fine. It is generally the contrary—people go to church on a fine Sunday, and stay at home on a wet one."

"You do not understand, Sophy," replied my aunt, "because you never do seem to understand anything; still you ought to know your uncle would not take the horses all the way to Klipton if it seemed likely to be a showery day."

"To Klipton!" I cried—"to Klipton!"

I then discovered that for some time past dear Catherine had strongly advised my uncle and aunt to take an empty pew there was in Klipton Church. I knew Catherine had driven the mule to Klipton the last two Sundays.

"Catherine is delighted with Mr Thunderbore," said my aunt, "and she heard him preach an excellent sermon on the golden vessels of the Tabernacle, and she quite agreed with Lady Arabella in thinking him the soundest preacher at this side of the county; and Catherine says his style is forcible, but that he never startles you, because he always says just what you expect him to say; and Catherine says there are no really sound preachers in Vottingham, although Vottingham might be more convenient for putting up the horses, and Robert would like it better. At first your uncle said he would not take the horses to Klipton; but Catherine has heard of an excellent stable, so on Easter Sunday Edward told Catherine we should go there in future whenever it is fine; because, Sophy, you see there is no Ritualism, or mummery, or High Church hymnal at Klipton." My aunt sighed and shook her curls. "Mr Thunderbore," sighed she, "sings the Gospel."

BOOK III.

CHAPTER XXIV

KLIPTON is four miles and a half from Sherbrook Hall, and exactly the same distance from Mineham. Lady Arabella "sat under" the Rev. Mr Thunderbore.

On our arrival in church, we generally found Lady Arabella and Mr Scott seated in the large square pew opposite ours, at the other side of the aisle.

We left home very early, yet were constantly on the verge of being late for the wicked man. My uncle did not really like taking the horses to Klipton. Not that he objected, as one might suppose, to driving to church on a fine Sunday: he had always done so, and his father had driven into Harefield before him. I think, when he drove to Harefield, he felt, from long habit, that he was doing his duty, and taking the horses to church as well as Robert. But he had none of this feeling about driving to Klipton; and, moreover, he thought the road a hilly one. With the exception of a slight rise near the church, I could not see the hills; but then I never even perceived the Simplon.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had conceived so great an admiration for Mr Thunderbore, that she suffered from spiritual starvation when she did not hear him preach. Now it was all very fine, in a case of urgent spiritual necessity, for Mrs Stewart to take out the mule once in a way on a Sunday; but she never, never would do so as a rule! She therefore asked my aunt for a seat in our carriage. Thank heaven, she did not tatt at us! but she took up a great deal of room, as she was most particular in not permitting her dress to be crushed.

The first Sunday we drove to Klipton, my uncle sat next me on the back seat crumpled up as small as possible. Uncle Sherbrook liked to get out of the carriage whenever he imagined

we were coming to a hill. He would say his legs were stiff, and would walk slowly along the road, stopping every now and then to behead a weed: he would thus keep the horses at a walk, and give them a rest on the sly. This trick of resting the horses on the sly, when there was a carriageful of ladies, was one of my uncle's time-honoured and most cherished peculiarities; and he was much annoyed to find he could not get in and out of the carriage without tripping in Mrs Stewart's skirt, and getting a very black look from her besides.

The following Sunday my uncle sent Thomas to sit by Snipkins in the dickey, and sat himself on the box, from whence he had an uninterrupted view of the hills. After this he always sat on the box, and each Sunday he and Robert saw the hills more clearly than the Sunday before. Uncle Sherbrook would walk half the way to Klipton, and keep us standing on the road while he dawdled purposely behind. No wonder Aunt Jane addled one's brain by repeating incessantly that she knew we should be late!

I detested this weekly dawdle on the Klipton road: the tediousness of all this snailing and stopping irritated me more than I can tell. The drive seemed endless,—even longer than Mr Thunderbore's sermon. I would beg to be allowed to get out and walk, but Mrs Stewart would not hear of such a monstrous thing. “Sophy will bungle out of the carriage all twisted up in my tail, and then she will bungle in again with muddy boots and dirty our dresses, Mrs Sherbrook.”

When at last we got to church, I am glad to say Aunt Jane thoroughly approved of Mr Thunderbore's doctrine; and when we came out of church, she much enjoyed the agreeable chat she would have with Lady Arabella. Instead of a stray *Thankee* or a snub from Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and a snub or a glorification of condescension from her nephew, my aunt had a very pleasant weekly gossip in Klipton churchyard. Lady Arabella was really fond of society, and the most friendly and talkative of women. She and Aunt Jane sat on a raised flat tombstone, and talked while waiting for their carriages, and in no hurry for them to come. Lady Arabella's old-fashioned chariot generally arrived first. She put up her horses at a greater distance from the church than we did ours, but then her coachman went out just before the extreme end of Mr Thunderbore's discourse, while Robert stayed to hear the last word.

When Lady Arabella met Aunt Jane in the porch, the two ladies invariably began to talk about the sermon; but they were not seated on the tombstone before Lady Arabella had branched off into her favourite topics of who married whom,

and what his father left him, and what fortune she had, and whose daughter she was, and what relation everybody was to everybody else, and of how there were families claiming to be connected with others of the same name when it was well known there was no acknowledged connection between them, and of how in some authenticated cases people had even borne the family title where they had no right to it at all. "And there was that very curious instance in the Dumbledore family . . ." and Lady Arabella would look much shocked and much pleased, and would lower her voice to a whisper. I would take the hint and walk away.

Uncle Sherbrook was never present to interrupt my lady's little Sunday stories, for he always came out of church in a great fuss about the horses: he wondered what on earth delayed Robert, and thought something must have happened, and went down the road to meet the carriage.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would be quite engaged talking to Mr David Scott. She monopolised him in the civilest and most flattering manner imaginable.

I was glad there was no one left for me to talk to. The churchyard and the sorrows written upon the gravestones inclined me to be silent. But indeed I should have hesitated in a much livelier place before I inflicted myself upon a stranger. I remembered how I had bored Mr Scott long ago, and that was when the old Adam within me was still in good spirits. And now I felt I had become dull of wit and heavy-minded, without conversation or spirit. When women are shut up, and neither marry nor go into the world amongst poor or rich, they grow unnaturally shy and dull: they are no longer what nature made them, but what the repression and the depression of near relations forces them to become.

As Mr and Mrs Thunderbore passed through the churchyard, they spoke to Lady Arabella and Aunt Jane, but did not remain many minutes, because the homely Mrs Thunderbore always felt very anxious her husband should eat his Sunday dinner while it was hot. When the Thunderbores had disappeared through the wicket into the parsonage, my aunt and Lady Arabella resumed their seat on the tombstone and their former conversation. I marvelled it never seemed to strike them it was rather odd for two ladies of serious views to sit Sunday after Sunday gossiping upon a tombstone. I really believe they quite forgot the convenient slab hid a grave. I would look and wonder, and tell myself there was no sense in the pain the lively talking voices gave me; for what is the whole

world, I would think, but a tomb ? and what are all the pleasure-loving, witty, laughing people but jesters in a grave-yard ? Our buried friends are no more here than in our ball-room or dining-room. Our dead are in heaven or in hell, and only a little dust lies here, and a few crumbling bones that we would shrink from, and not love but hate. Still, reason as I might, the thought of all the joy and yearning love buried with bitter tears in the graves around me, made me feel the churchyard to be a holy place sanctified by the agony of many a mourner.

The look of Lady Arabella, decidedly rouged and bewigged, gossiping on a tombstone, filled me with all sorts of sad and grotesque ideas. I thought her just the figure for an allegory of human life ; yet indeed, wrinkled vanity seated upon a tombstone and forgetting the grave, would be a true picture of life, and no allegory at all.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would be in quite a good temper and much less touchy about her dress while driving home. In the afternoon, when tired of Aunt Jane's transitions and the Commentary, she would even talk to me, as if almost pleased with me.

The admirable Catherine never failed to keep her own copy of Dr MacShaw's blessed work open in her hand on a Sabbath afternoon while she gossiped to me ; so it was betwixt the leaves of the Commentary, as it were, that I used to hear all about Lady Arabella and Mr David Scott and their private affairs.

Mrs Stewart told me Mr Scott was Lady Arabella's nephew by marriage, the only child of her late husband's second brother. This brother was a dashing soldier, and had but little money to begin with. He spent that little, and then married a lady who had none. The penniless couple had one son. The mother died of a fever, and the father was killed in the Crimea. Lady Arabella had no child, so she took the boy, dressed him in fancy costume, and was very kind to him. The boy was just thirteen years of age, when it happened that Lord Clinchfisted perceived all of a sudden that he had no son of his own, and that his young cousin David Scott might some day be his heir. The Earl of Clinchfisted sent the boy to Eton and Oxford, and allowed him £800 a-year when he left college.

Mrs Stewart said Lady Arabella told her Mr David Scott was considered wonderfully clever at Oxford, and that it was well known he might easily have taken a first class had he wished it ; but he did not wish it, and did not go in for honours, and only took a common degree. He was a capital oar, a first-rate whip, and an eloquent speaker at the Union. Lord Clinchfisted went up to Oxford during Mr Scott's last term,

and heard his young cousin make a very glib speech on the right of primogeniture, and on the fatal consequences of frittering amongst younger branches of a family the wealth which is the power of an aristocracy ; and Lord Clinchfisted thought the speech one of the most sensible he had ever heard a young fellow make. The consequence was, that some nine months afterwards, when the Liberal member for Clinchton got *delirium tremens*, Lord Clinchfisted advised Mr David Scott to stand for the borough in the Conservative interest, promising to pay the expenses of a contested election. Mr Scott was returned at the head of the poll. The Earl kept his promise : he had a large sum to pay, and yet he increased his cousin's allowance to £1000 a-year.

It seems Mr Scott's maiden speech at Westminster proved a success, and Mrs Stewart told me he was beginning to think "the House" the pleasantest club in the world, when old Lady Clinchfisted most perversely took it into her head to die. Within a year my lord was married to a very handsome young lady—a bridegroom of sixty to a bride of eighteen. Within another year a son and heir was born.

While the bonfires were still alight in honour of this great event, there was a general election. Mr Scott went down to Clinchton, perfectly certain he had only to show himself to be re-elected. He soon found his mistake. There was a sharp contest for the borough. The old Liberal member had left the asylum in good spirits and restored to health. This wealthy distiller was a popular man, and his had been an illness which excites more sympathy north of the Tweed than south. Mr David Scott lost his seat. Neither Lord Clinchfisted nor his agent had troubled himself to canvass in his favour.

"I know nothing of our electoral laws," said Mrs Stewart, "and I am ignorant of what exactly constitutes bribery ; but I am quite sure, from what I have seen and heard, that a certain amount of whiskey is legal in a Scotch election."

She told me Mr Scott referred the numerous claims made upon him to Lord Clinchfisted's agent. The agent referred them to his lordship ; whereupon my lord wrote a very stiff letter to his cousin, telling him plainly he had no right whatever to expect his debts to be paid by the head of the family. However, my lord graciously condescended to say that, for the honour of the family name, he would this once bear the expenses of his cousin's defeat. In order to do so more conveniently, Lord Clinchfisted intimated he would stop Mr Scott's allowance, adding that, much as he might regret it, he could

not in future continue that or any other allowance, without prejudice to his son's interest.

"How well I remember Lord Clinchfisted's letter!" said Mrs Stewart; "it made poor dear Lady Arabella quite ill, and she stayed in bed for a week with all the blinds pulled down. She got such a shock, that she had not even the energy to—to—" Mrs Stewart hesitated—"to have her hair dressed. You see, Sophy," she continued, "David Scott was a perfect beggar. Lady Arabella has only an annuity and Mineham for life. At her death, her own fortune reverts to her family, and everything else goes to her brother-in-law. He is her husband's youngest brother, and never would have been left the fortune, only her husband made sure his nephew David was to have a title and £30,000 a-year, and he did not want Mineham to be swallowed up in the Clinchfisted estates."

I thought Mr Scott had been hardly used by fate, and treated cruelly by Lord Clinchfisted.

"And what did poor Mr David Scott do, Mrs Stewart?" I asked, now really interested, and moved by the idea of so great a change of fortune.

"What could he do? Lady Arabella can only allow him £200 a-year, though she has sold her house in London, and merely takes one for the season. He was too old for the army."

"I tell you what he could have done, Catherine," exclaimed Aunt Jane, awaking from her copy of the *Commentary*—"I tell you what he could have done: as he is such a clever man, and indeed quite a genius, he could have got the Carlton Club to return him to Parliament,—for every one says the Carlton Club is only too delighted to return any man of genius, and to pay all his expenses; and then, Catherine, when David Scott was once more in Parliament, he could have made a very, very clever speech, and he would have been a Minister before long. I remember when I was young, my mother (your grandmother, Sophy) used to read out the lives of great men—people like—like—what was the name of that celebrated minister who—well, you are most provoking, Sophy, for you never remember anything; and if I forget any little fact or name in history, you never can help me. But it does not matter who he was, Catherine; for I recollect quite distinctly he was Prime Minister in the second chapter, and all the rest of the book was about foreign wars."

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook!" cried Mrs Stewart, "I cannot imagine who your great man was! But ten thousand to one, he married some sort of an heiress."

"No, no," replied Aunt Jane; "there was nothing about an heiress or about his wife at all; for I am sure I should remember about his wife, as I always remember about people's wives and children."

"Even Canning," insisted Mrs Stewart, "married an heiress. And nowadays, if you have nothing of your own, you would have to marry two—kill the first, and marry a second. My dear Mrs Sherbrook, a man must have money: Conservative politics are too expensive for a poor man. David Scott must marry an heiress. Indeed, Lady Arabella says there is nothing else for him to do."

"Then why does not he marry an heiress?" asked my aunt; "he might fall in love with her just as well as with a lady who has no fortune. I am sure Edward would have fallen in love with me just the same if I had had a very large fortune; because I know it was myself he liked, and I should have been the same person if I had been richer."

My aunt looked pleased at the brilliancy of her own logic.

"Oh, my dear Mrs Sherbrook!" cried Mrs Stewart, laughing—"my dear Mrs Sherbrook, how innocent you are! Heiresses are not to be found nowadays waiting at the cross-roads. You have far to drive when you have not four horses! A man who has not a penny, or a title, or an expectation in the world, stays at home, and does not go courting an heiress on foot, without a single feather in his cap! Besides, when David Scott had a chance, you know Louisa Clarke spoilt his prospects. You know, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, how outrageously she flirted with him when that first baby died. Lady Clarke encouraged him, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone quite took him up: the Rigardy-Wrenstones thought they should like to have a countess for a cousin. David Scott and Louisa were regularly engaged."

"What baby died?" I asked; for Aunt Jane seemed to know all about it. Mrs Stewart told me the Clinchfisted child, whose birth was Mr Scott's ruin, had died in early infancy. She gave me the date of its death, and I remember thinking it occurred just about the time of my first ball.

"But another son was born again in no time," said the admirable Catherine, in a tone of disgust; "and it has not the slightest intention of dying!"

The third or fourth Sunday that we went to Klipton Church, I thought Lady Arabella looking less cheerful than usual. It was not fancy on my part, for Aunt Jane had hardly taken her seat in the carriage, when she exclaimed—

"Poor dear Lady Arabella! she is quite in low spirits, Catherine, because the Clinchfisteds have another son."

"What!" cried Mrs Stewart; "two sons? and both alive together! Well, really Lady Clarke is not to be blamed,—for, as Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone says, circumstances have changed; and when Mr Tankney is paying Louisa such marked attention, it would be madness not to break with David Scott."

The following Sunday morning Uncle Sherbrook was much perturbed in humour and appetite; for, on tapping the barometer, it fell. The morning looked bright, and Aunt Jane was sure the weather would be fine; but Uncle Sherbrook finally had his own way, and settled we were to have a showery day. So we went to Harefield Church. We had to drive round by Riverbank to pick up Mrs Stewart. The bell had stopped when we arrived at the church-door. My uncle went first up the narrow staircase which led to our side of the gallery. Ever since my uncle's mother had restored the old church many long years ago, the gallery had been divided into two large square pews—the one belonging to the Abbey, and the other to the Hall. There was a passage between and behind them, and a little wooden staircase at each end of the gallery, which encircled the church-tower and met in the porch.

I happened to be following close upon Uncle Sherbrook's steps. He stopped at the top of the staircase. Never shall I forget the expression of his countenance! I thought he had come face to face with Beelzebub! And so he had, and with Beelzebub seated in his own pew! Lord Tankney, a good many gentlemen, and a few gaily dressed ladies, completely filled Uncle Sherbrook's pew. Not one of the party offered to move, or even to make room. Rigardy-Wrenstone leant over the side of his pew and beckoned to Uncle Sherbrook with that indescribable air of elation he sometimes puts on. My uncle went forward. Denis spoke to him in a low voice. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone looked up through her eye-glass from the harmonium. Uncle Sherbrook gave no answer. He walked straight down the stairs at the other side of the gallery. In following him, I looked round and saw Aunt Jane all in a flurry shaking her curls, and Mrs Stewart, both ushered by Denis into the Abbey pew. I did not turn back, but followed Uncle Sherbrook. I had sympathy with him, for I knew my cousin and the expression of his face well enough to guess what he had done. I had a contempt for such petty spite.

Uncle Sherbrook said he was going home, but bade me stay in church and sit down-stairs. He spoke in a peremptory voice, but in no unkindly one.

I sat near the door, so I was amongst the first to leave. I

waited in the carriage for Mrs Stewart and Aunt Jane. My aunt came alone. She was overflowing on the subject of the Abbey pew.

"Sophy, I have not sat there since I was married. I knew Denis had come down from town for Whitsuntide, but I never thought he would ask me into his pew. But then, Sophy, how could I think the Tankneys would sit in our pew? Something very queer must have happened; and I wonder old Tom let any one sit in our pew—and Edward will be very angry with him."

I saw Denis with his hands full of Tankney prayer-books, and Lord Tankney carrying Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's hymnal with the large gold cross on the outside. Denis walked between two ladies of the Tankney party, while Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone seemed to keep rather ostentatiously away from them, walking apart with Lord Tankney: however, she appeared to be saying *Thankee* quite graciously. Miss Eleanor Warbattle followed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and the two Clarckes followed her—Fanny and Louisa each with an admirer. Louisa was casting languishing eyes, and a smile played upon her parted lips. I saw Mrs Stewart tuck up her dress, trip lightly over some graves, and make room for herself at the other side of Louisa's young gentleman. He was evidently no new acquaintance. Mrs Stewart shook hands with him in the most cordial manner, and monopolised him for quite five minutes, to Louisa Clarke's undisguised annoyance.

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook," said Mrs Stewart, when at last she stepped into the carriage, "I just stayed behind to ask Mary Sherbrook the name of that second hymn."

She evidently expected a Ritualistic hymnal transition from Aunt Jane; but my aunt was not to be so easily put off.

"Catherine, Catherine," she said, "who is the young gentleman you were talking to?"

When Aunt Jane heard and realised he was young Mr Tankney she was scandalised, and she was also offended; "for I thought, Catherine, you always told me everything, but you never told me you knew Mr Tankney." And Aunt Jane wondered more about this acquaintance with Mr Tankney than she did about the pew.

During that afternoon a special messenger rode over from the Abbey with a letter for Uncle Sherbrook. My uncle gave me the letter to read, much to Aunt Jane's jealous disgust. Rigardy-Wrenstone informed Uncle Sherbrook that there had been a redistribution of seats in Harefield Church during the last

fortnight, and that Uncle Sherbrook, being no longer a church-warden, had no power to alter the new arrangement.

The first thing on Monday morning, my uncle sent a man and horse into Vottingham for Mr Boggle.

When my uncle's mother had restored Harefield Church, she had given £400 more than she had promised to give, on condition that half the gallery should be appropriated for ever as sittings to Sherbrook Hall, no matter who lived there. I cannot say whether it was illegal to make such a condition, or whether there was no document to prove the contract, or whether there was a flaw in the document which was supposed to prove it. I have never discussed the matter with Mr Jones. I only know that Mr Boggle, "having taken the first opinion in London," finally informed my uncle that the churchwardens of Harefield Church had done nothing actually illegal: the learned counsel in town did not advise my uncle to file a bill against them.

It was a great shock to Uncle Sherbrook to find a lawsuit might put him legally in the wrong, when he felt so strongly he was morally in the right. It was a shock I do not think he ever quite recovered. He was not well at the time.

In the exercise of his office as churchwarden, Rigardy-Wrenstone had not forgotten to redistribute his own square pew to himself.

The sight of Lord Tankney, her ladyship, the young gentleman, and all their gay friends, seated in that hereditary square pew, which the village seemed to believe had been given to Squire Sherbrook by the Apostles, did not disturb the devotions of Harefield for more than two successive Sundays. After that, we were told the Tankneys sent their servants to worship in their stead, Lady Tankney's own maid permanently occupying Aunt Jane's particular corner.

As to Rigardy-Wrenstone, he was so elated by his own cleverness, that I saw him one day, with his hat cocked crooked, walking through the village solely by means of his shirt-cuffs. "Off to Manyfields to-morrow!" cried he. "Georgina, two Clarckes, and myself! Fred Tankney meets us on the road! Quite large party! House full! No end of a bore!"

Shortly afterwards Uncle Sherbrook met Sir John Moultrie in Vottingham, and Sir John told him Lady Offaway was giving out all over the county, that if people wanted invitations to Manyfields they must be civil to young Mr Tankney, her ladyship and the young gentleman having struck up a friendship in the hunting-field. It was said, reported Sir John, that Lady Offaway, being "hard up," rode Mr Fred Tankney's horses.

CHAPTER XXV.

Uncle Sherbrook was a gentleman. The idea of meeting my cousin on his own ground, or of teasing him with a set of pettifogging little worries, never entered his head. On the contrary, when his nephew's straying bull made a gap in his hedge and knocked down three feet of a wall, Uncle Sherbrook repaired the breach at his own expense. Had he been good friends with Denis, he would have let him pay for the damage done.

I was sorry Rigardy-Wrenstone amused his petty vanity by constantly worrying Uncle Sherbrook, because, when much teased, my uncle would no longer get angry, but would look worn and enfeebled. At such times, if I went and sat beside him, he would, in his own grave way, be very kind to me, as if subdued into a sort of gentleness. The last few months my feeling towards Uncle Sherbrook had become quite a tenderness tinged with pity, for I had noticed signs of failing health in the old man : there were days when I was touched to see the feebleness which had been strength. I could not help perceiving Uncle Sherbrook was drawing near to that time when we like to feel some one full of life is standing by us as a friend—some one with sight clear enough to see if servants bully or impatient will-waiters annoy. I felt my uncle liked to have me near him, and that no stranger would be quite to him what I was. It would have seemed strange to most people had I told them this feeling was the one joy of my life. It was this which made me continue to live on at Sherbrook Hall, for I had never thought I could have lived nearly three long years in that place, where life was stagnation, with an avenue-gate at each end, and a narrow prison between.

The close companionship with Aunt Jane's mind was still, as at first, a daily mental pain to me, lengthening the minutes into hours, the hours into days, and making the days endless ; for habit never could accustom me to this terrible weariness.

As a relief from the fatiguing despair of Aunt Jane's flowing talk, I had often tried, but as yet in vain, to find something to interest me in Mrs Stewart's conversation. The admirable Catherine had a cut-and-dried sort of mind. Even her charities were a hard profession—a kind of civil-engineering, by which she bored tunnels into comfortable houses where there were good cooks, or opened up a way for herself towards great people. Her charity was a worldly calculation, and was not

the outcome of sympathy or kindness. She had no sympathy in her composition, no imagination. I used to hope she might tell me something original about those blacks for whom she was so constantly collecting; but I found such stories as she had to tell were all of a pattern, taken from one particular style of tract—it was invariably the edifying life and pious death of Sambo. I was dead sick of that sort of Sambo! I had tired of him in early youth. My imagination would have liked to hear of quite another kind of nigger—of the one who eats his father, and if his mother is fat, eats her too. For I had fancied there were still a few savages in Africa. Mrs Stewart's blacks never ate each other: if by accident they ate a missionary, they were converted internally while digesting him.

When I came to be much with Mrs Stewart, I perceived, to my surprise, that it was not the many coloured saints she collected for, but the shining lights of this world she collected from, who inspired her with interest. I remarked, when she mentioned her blacks, Turks, Egyptians, postmen, dogs, or infidels, she never forgot to tell you the name of any distinguished subscriber to the societies for whom she was acting secretary: the higher their social position, the more intimate Mrs Stewart declared herself to be with her fellow-labourers in the Lord's vineyard. She stopped to tell you all about their private affairs, and what Christian-minded people they were, and how many thousands a-year they had, and who they all married and did not marry. I found Mrs Stewart could be a far livelier and more original story-teller when she intermarried and broke the hearts of great and good people, or of great and good people's near relations, than when she turned up her eyes, and sighed, and yawned, and told, in the words of a tract, how Sambo lived and died. Then Sambo was not related to the peerage: he was only good because he was black.

I observed with amazement that, to a lady like the admirable Catherine, piety, however sound, is not perfectly beautiful unless highly connected. This astonished me! But what astonished me still more was to find that "really nice people's" connections could be "unsound," and yet be neither publicans nor sinners. Every Sunday Mr David Scott yawned and fidgeted during the Rev. Mr Thunderbore's sermon: the golden vessels of the Tabernacle irritated him beyond polite endurance. But to Mrs Stewart he was Lady Arabella's nephew, that dear creature's adopted son, so his yawns did not send him to hell: had the two Clinchfisted babies died, I verily believe they might have taken him to heaven. I thought this rather strange doctrine to be held by the best and soundest of women.

The interest Mrs Stewart took in all Lady Arabella's affairs was truly wonderful, and it extended to Mr David Scott.

On Sunday afternoon Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart would rest in an easy-chair, and, with her hands crossed over the open Commentary, would break David Scott's heart, and marry Louisa Clarke straight off to Mr Tankney. The admirable Catherine broke people's hearts in the most cheerful manner possible—quite in her liveliest "happy release" style! "I took the mule over to Klipton last Friday," she exclaimed; "there was service in the church, and Lady Arabella had said she would be there. Lady Arabella told me everything! The Rigardy-Wrenstones are set upon catching Fred Tankney, and so is Louisa. They have been constantly dining at the Abbey, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has actually called upon Lady Tankney, though nobody goes to Tank Court."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's black eyes sparkled with pleasure. I believe the delight lay in Lady Arabella's having told her "everything"! It seemed to be agreeably exciting to be "told everything" by Lady Arabella! As to poor Mr Scott's disappointment, Mrs Stewart never cast a thought upon it. It is sympathy which divines the unhappiness of others, and sympathy is only the imagination of the heart. Mrs Stewart having no imagination whatever, could not have sympathy.

Had the admirable Catherine spoken kindly of David Scott's disappointment, I should have nodded my head at her as I did Aunt Jane, and have said "Indeed!" without listening. But her hardness surprised me into interest. It startled me, and set me thinking. I began to think very much about Mr Scott. I often thought of him, and I pictured to myself what a clever, eager man would feel if balked in life—if his career, fortune, future, were suddenly taken from him, when perhaps it had never even struck him they were not his own. To think you are a rising man, and then to discover you have already fallen; to have the world before you to-day, and nothing to-morrow but ruin without a future—poverty, which is a narrow prison to men brought up like David Scott,—what cruel, cruel disappointment, thought I—what a blight to fall upon an eager life! I felt myself that prison-life was hard to bear, though I had never been beyond the prison-gates; so I could conceive what it would be to leave a large, free world for some small, narrow life, just when ambition, like an eye first opened to sight, saw clearly a great future lying before it.

With all these imaginations in my mind, it grieved me to look at David Scott. I looked at him every Sunday during the sermon. I thought his was the face of a man ruined in

love and life. I pitied him, and considered Louisa strangely unkind to have no pity for a ruined man. Had I been an agreeable, attractive creature, who felt she could please and amuse, I think I should have summoned courage to try and enliven Mr Scott, and to share his acquaintance with Mrs Stewart. But I thought it kinder to sit apart and wait for the carriage alone by the churchyard-gate. No one but I seemed to notice poor David Scott's great unhappiness. Mrs Stewart was so cheerful and talkative herself, that I have heard her declare Lady Arabella's nephew had wonderful spirits.

My imagination, once interested in the poor man's sad troubles, took to weaving romances about him. In youth imagination is half our soul. I could not bear to think David Scott was always to be unhappy. I would think Louisa might some day feel a great wish to comfort him, and then perhaps inherit a fortune and marry him, and with her money make a career for him in life. I imagined what the two would say, and how he would plead to her, and what all their feelings might be: their joy filled me with joy. I would question Mrs Stewart a great deal about Mr Scott and Louisa, and then my fancy would embroider on all she told me. It was thus, by accident, almost without my perceiving it, that I did at length find interest in her conversation.

For several Sundays I had in this manner questioned Mrs Stewart across her volume of the *Commentary*, while Aunt Jane was dozing over hers. But one Sabbath, when I was falling, as usual, upon the same topic, the admirable Catherine sat up in her chair with a jerk which sent Dr MacShaw to the ground. She fixed her penetrating eyes upon me. "Indeed, Miss Sophy," cried she, "you seem to take a surprising interest in David Scott and his love affairs. Never till now have I seen you take so much interest in any one!"

There was something in this speech, I knew not what, which made me blush, and offended me. I thought the best of women's rasping voice rasped more disagreeably than I had ever heard it rasp before. I feared it might awaken Aunt Jane and set her wondering. But my aunt was fast asleep, for she had really read a page of the *Commentary* before she closed her eyes. I never again mentioned Mr Scott or Louisa Clarke to Mrs Stewart. Whenever she tried to broach the subject, I talked of the blacks.

There was a week when the admirable Catherine only came three times to luncheon and dinner. I forget whether it was the second or third week in February. I have a bad memory for dates, or I should certainly recollect this one, because the singu-

larity of the circumstance was quite an event to Aunt Jane, and made her wonder until I grew bothered from saying "Indeed!"

There was really nothing marvellous in the matter. It would undoubtedly have been wonderful had the admirable Catherine lunched and dined at home four days in the week; but she did nothing of the sort—she only lunched and dined at the Abbey instead of lunching and dining at the Hall. I had long perceived her great anxiety to be intimate with the Rigardy-Wrenstones, so I was not surprised to hear she had undertaken to find Jumping Georgy a first-rate cook.

Mrs Stewart was clever in getting cooks for other people: her particularity as to the soundness of the doctrine put into her own gravy was the sole reason she could never get one for herself. But Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone did not care if Popery or Dissent were served up in the sauce, so long as the cook mixed no grease with her "views." Such a contrast to Aunt Jane, who thought so much of her cook's views and so little of her cook's grease!

Mrs Stewart proved most successful in finding a cook quickly for Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. She just lunched and dined four times at the Abbey, and talked over the numerous applicants she had seen in Vottingham, and discussed the answers she had received to her advertisements. So good-natured a creature was the excellent, indefatigable Catherine, that we met her driving towards the Abbey with a fat person seated beside her in the mule-carriage. She afterwards told us she had driven to Vottingham herself to fetch the cook in a hurry. Her quick sight perceived that all this anxiety to please Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone made Aunt Jane a little jealous, so she said, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, how I wish you wanted a cook! I would drive up to London and bring her down all the way in the mule-carriage. But you have your own excellent Emma!—the best of servants!—whose views exactly suit your own! As to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, you would be shocked by her; for I deeply regret to say she does not care what doctrine her cook holds. You are very different, my dear Mrs Sherbrook—very different indeed! It would take me a month to get *you* a cook: any sort of religion would not do for you!"

This was intended to be a compliment, and it was taken as such. Aunt Jane was mollified: the pleasant flattery put her into the best of humours. How spiritually refreshing it is to feel that a laxity of views tolerated at the Abbey would never suit the superior piety of one's own household arrangements!

Whenever my aunt was in good spirits, she would remember she wanted to buy a reel of cotton at Smith's shop, and would

remark that Smith had pretty things in his window, and that she had once bought a very nice dressing-gown there—a red flannel one with black spots. She made these remarks while walking on the front avenue, and remembered the reel at the lodge-gate.

While she was buying the cotton, and perhaps improving the occasion to Smith's girls, Mrs Stewart and I waited for her in the street. Mrs Stewart hoped Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone would drive past. The good lady was so spiritually elated by the great service she had been enabled to render Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, that she could not help boasting of it even to me. "Poor dear Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone!" she exclaimed, "what a state she was in! Arriving from Scotland on Monday! The Offaways would not let them leave before! The Clarckes invited for Saturday! The Offaways coming to Tank Court, and asked to dine at the Abbey on Saturday, and no cook in the house! I heard of a woman I thought would suit, so I drove over to Vottingham and brought the cook back in the mule-carriage. She was just in time. I helped her myself with the jellies, and I never saw a dinner better dressed. Lady Offaway is a charming person—simply charming! and Mr Tankney made himself most agreeable, and paid the greatest attention to Louisa Clarcke. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was enchanted, for she is set on the match. She declared she never could forget my kindness; but really I told her I was only too delighted to be of use to her, and that trouble was no trouble if taken for her."

"Very polite of you, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart!" I said—"very polite indeed! But why is it," I asked, looking into her expressive eyes—"why is it you are so anxious to be of use to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and to be intimate with her, when you are always telling Aunt Jane she is rude and queer, and, even worse, unsound?"

I expected a reply in the charity and high-piety style. Mrs Stewart surprised me by saying, without the slightest hesitation—"Sophy, I know what the world is, and you do not. It is wise, when you have the opportunity, to make intimate friends for yourself in the county where you intend to live. The opportunity must be seized when it comes to hand, for it is not always to be caught by feeling for it. In future life, I think it will be desirable for me to be on good terms with the best county people. I act accordingly."

"In future life!" I repeated—"in future life!" That expression caught my ear. "Mrs Stewart," said I, "when people talk of future life, I have observed their mind's eye is looking over some old friend's grave, as yet undug: their

thoughts dig the grave and span it. Uncle Sherbrook is growing old, and you have seen the change in him. I know you have seen it,—you see everything! Mrs Stewart," I asked, "when he is dead, do you expect it will be too dull for you to lunch and dine at Sherbrook with Aunt Jane? or what do you expect or mean? You cannot mean, Mrs Stewart, that in future life you will keep a cook at Riverbank?"

"Where else should I keep my cook or live?" cried Catherine Stewart, eyeing me as if she imagined there was a secret in my mind she could not read. But there was no after-thought in what I had said. I had no secret, and I think she was satisfied I had none.

Aunt Jane appeared, and put an end to further conversation.

Mrs Stewart had surprised me. It was not her long sight stretching over graves into future years which astonished me. This vista seemed quite natural to eyes like hers. What amazed me was her honesty. Doubtless she had told me the truth, because she knew by instinct I would only believe the truth; and she wanted me to believe and not to despise her, but rather to respect her clever penetration. She was right. I thought better of her for having the courage to avow the worldly policy by which I knew she was actuated; and I was sure she knew I would think the better and not the worse of her. When she cares to know your thoughts, her instinct divines them like genius.

If you live with really dull people, it is strange how you will admire a flash of any sort of talent. I almost admired Mrs Stewart—she was so clever. I also feared a little the woman who could read my thoughts; for my thoughts about her were rarely flattering, and I knew this fact would make her my enemy. It is not very pleasant to feel you have an enemy for ever lunching, walking, dining, and tatting by your side.

I became interested, and even amused, by observing the untiring consistency with which Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart persevered in making herself useful to Aunt Jane, to Jumping Georgy, and to Lady Arabella Scott. She was like a Prime Minister with a State policy definitely laid down.

The general outline of the policy was clear enough, but I did not trouble my head to unravel all the little ins and outs, for there were details I should have thought irrelevant to the grand design, had I not firmly believed our intriguing saint never laboured in any vineyard without a motive, and that all her motives were links fitting into one chain. Only for this belief, I should have been at a loss to conceive why on earth Mrs Stewart was so very anxious Aunt Jane should invite Lady

Arabella to stay at Sherbrook Hall. She actually got the subject on her nerves.

She worked hard, and by some occult act persuaded Snipkins the green room would be all the better if opened, aired, and inhabited. Snipkins persuaded, it seemed as if there was no one else in the house to persuade. Snipkins permitting, Aunt Jane wrote an invitation to Lady Arabella, and sent it off by the next post.

The day Lady Arabella was to arrive, Mrs Stewart came to luncheon, bringing a small box and a carpet-bag with her in the mule-carriage. She said she had come to help her dear Mrs Sherbrook to entertain Lady Arabella, but declared no room need be got ready for her—she would just have a bed made up on the couch in Sophy's room. Aunt Jane was so pleased with her dear, excellent, indefatigable Catherine's thoughtful kindness, that I had not even the option of refusing the company of a most unwelcome intruder. It is hardly necessary to add that I slept on the small couch, and Mrs Stewart in my bed.

Aunt Jane was in high spirits. I think she expected to be much edified by Lady Arabella; and no wonder! for Lady Arabella was patroness of many admirable societies, besides being a nominal stall-holder at most fashionable bazaars, and a real one at those sales where worsted-work and pincushions were disposed of for the benefit of the blacks.

My aunt was busy on and off for a day or two turning down the pages of some paper books—the Reports of six different societies, who promoted six different kinds of conversion amongst the coloured races of men. Dear me! thought I, we are to have nothing but blacks, Turks, and piety! I wonder if Lady Arabella will intermarry the blacks; for she must intermarry and relate either blacks or whites.

I was right; but it was exclusively the whites, and not the blacks, for whom her ladyship broke off matches or made them. At first this rather astonished me. Then I remembered Lady Arabella was fond of a little scandal, and I supposed Sambo to be so exemplary in domestic life that his conduct never could give rise to any tale not perfectly edifying.

Aunt Jane started the Missionary Reports several times; but Lady Arabella yawned, and Mrs Stewart twisted my aunt's transitions so that her ladyship could gossip and intermarry to her heart's content. I perceived that at all hours and moments Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was Lady Arabella's indefatigable toady. Only a very active person could have been equal to the task of unceasing flattery which Mrs Stewart set herself. I listened

and was amazed. Lady Arabella is singularly open to flattery. She seems to be vain of everything belonging to her: of her voice—particularly of her voice, though she has lost it these many years; of her music; of the make of her frightful caps; and actually of her complexion, for I really believe there are times when she deceives herself into thinking the rouge upon her cheeks is the natural bloom of youth. Her vanity, when satisfied, is of the happy, funny kind. Lady Arabella is a good-natured, good-humoured old lady, of rather limited intellect. She and Aunt Jane cordially liked each other, for their minds were much on a par, only Lady Arabella's was the clearer of the two. She intermarried acquaintances and related friends with a very moderate amount of confusion, and she generally fixed the right story on to the right person, and never made people run away with their own wives.

Now it was after this manner that Aunt Jane intermarried “Edward’s” relations and told tales of former acquaintances. Mrs Stewart happened to remark—“Indeed, Lady Arabella, they were quite nice people. She was a Miss MacLarty-MacLaran, and her mother was a Campbell. Her sister married Lord Frederic Warbattle, who came into the dukedom when the old Duke of Dumbledore died. He was the third brother, but the second was killed out hunting. The MacLarty-MacLarans are very well connected.”

“Oh yes, Catherine,” Aunt Jane said; “just let me think. Surely I know something about the MacLarty-MacLarans!—something about a very curious wedding; and I think there was an old black cat in the family, which used to appear when any one was going to be unlucky or to die—or was it a witch? No, no; I remember it was a ghost, quite white, and with a bloody hand, because one of the MacLartys had killed a Fraser of Drumloch, and his ghost always had a bloody hand afterwards. Kitty Fraser’s father was descended from that very man; and, Catherine, you knew Kitty Fraser long ago—before she married and left Scotland? But, as I was saying, Edward’s cousin, one of the Stewarts . . . no! what am I thinking of? it was not one of the Stewarts; it was one of the Gordon girls married a MacLarty-MacLaran, and the ghost came to the wedding-breakfast, though nobody saw him but the bride; and . . . let me think! Dear me! I do believe I am mistaken, after all! for it was a MacNaughten-MacNab she married. It is the two names which puzzled me, and I recollect now perfectly he was not a MacLarty-MacLaran, but a MacNaughten-MacNab, and a very queer-looking man, with a scrofulous face, and sandy hair, and something odd about the shape of his mouth. Edward is

not connected with either the MacLartys or the MacLarans, but he is with the MacNaughtens and MacNabs; and the lady who saw the ghost at her wedding-breakfast was really marrying a MacNab, for I was quite right in what I first said—it is a witch or a black cat which appears to the MacLarans and MacLartys; and it is only the MacNabs and their wives, and now that I come to think of it, not even the MacNaughtens, who see the dreadful ghost with the bloody hand. Sophy, look in Burke's 'Landed Gentry,' and you will find I am quite right, and that she did not marry a MacNab."

"If you do not see it in the 'Landed Gentry,'" said Lady Arabella, "you may perhaps find it in the 'Peerage,' at the end; for I rather think it is through some marriage with a Gordon that the MacNabs are claiming the old Earldom of Whasky. They say the title went in the female line."

My occupation was to verify intermarriages, and to clear up the confusion of distant connections who were somebody else's relations. I had rather hard work.

My big 'Debrett' and I were exiled to a distant window; therefore Lady Arabella could retail her little bits of scandal with that perfect propriety which is so admirable in persons of eminent piety. If for a moment the whispering at the fireplace became audible, I would catch something of this sort—"Ah! but don't you know the ins and outs of that little matter, Mrs Sherbrook? She was engaged to her second husband while the first was alive. When number one died and they were married, he was so jealous of her that she declared she could not live with him; and so one day, off she ran with the captain, who was twelve years younger than herself, and had not a penny; but all the fortune was in her own power, for the first husband left her everything." Aunt Jane would turn up her eyes and sigh over the wickedness of the world, and Lady Arabella would cry, "Shocking! shocking!" with the good-humoured air of a person who is thoroughly enjoying the pleasures of conversation. "Indeed, Mrs Sherbrook, it is shocking! But it is the fashion nowadays for all the ladies to run away from their husbands. You have heard of that terrible scandal about Lady Gomerry? Everybody is talking of it! one hears of nothing else! And now—could you believe it?—she actually . . ." and Lady Arabella would drop her voice to the low whisper which hallows all a lady says, and, for some strange reason, seems to make scandal no longer scandalous.

Though sanctified by all this whispering, some of Lady Arabella's little tales truly horrified Aunt Jane: she groaned aloud,

and wondered what Edward would think if he heard such things!

But Lady Arabella never talked scandal before Uncle Sherbrook. The first night my uncle took her ladyship in to dinner, she intermarried the Scotts and Stewarts. The second night, she intermarried a few of his more distant relations and a few of her own; but finding him rather inattentive, she tried some missionary statistics. The third evening, she began with the Christian negro, went on to the Turkish wife, but soon tired, yawned, and was silent. Lady Arabella considered Uncle Sherbrook such a really good, estimable man! She declared there were few people she respected more than Mr Sherbrook! Yet to respect a man is sometimes to admire him in theory, and to be bored and silenced by him in practice.

A little scene I witnessed between them amused me. Aunt Jane had insisted "Edward" should appear at afternoon tea. His presence stayed the flow of Lady Arabella's gossip. Uncle Sherbrook had nothing particular to say. He looked bored and slightly annoyed, for he generally read the 'Vottingham Newsletter' in his study from five o'clock till a quarter to six. At length, after two ineffectual attempts to make himself agreeable, my uncle pulled the paper out of his pocket, and gravely proposed to read Lady Arabella the news; whereupon my lady suddenly remembered she had a very important letter to write before post-time, so she went to the writing-table, and my uncle to his study.

Lady Arabella asked me afterwards if I thought she had offended that dear, good Mr Sherbrook? "Really, Sophy"—she too called me Sophy—"really, Sophy, I was afraid to encourage that worthy, serious man to read to me to-day, for fear he might want to read me the Burial Service to-morrow for a treat!"

Lady Arabella was very civil to me; and I discovered, to my great surprise, that I was a subject of conversation between her and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. On coming rather suddenly into the drawing-room the day after Lady Arabella's arrival, I caught the words, "Mr Jones . . . Sophy . . . I can assure you she has . . . does not know it herself . . .;" and both ladies started on seeing me. Lady Arabella seemed much confused, and Mrs Stewart reddened, but, instantly recovering her self-possession, the admirable Catherine sent me off all over the house on divers messages.

Before Lady Arabella came to Sherbrook Hall, my aunt had planned, as amusements, a visit to the far-distant Moultries, and

an expedition to a wet field about six miles off, said to be a Cæsar's camp. But the weather proved showery; and when Lady Arabella's toilette was finished, she preferred gossiping and intermarrying by the fireside. Lady Arabella has a complexion which cannot venture abroad in rainy weather. There are plenty of modern rouges, I am told, which can get wet with impunity; but Lady Arabella's is an old-fashioned complexion, and the rain can wash it quite away. I am not at all sure Lady Arabella does not think modern cosmetics sinful. I know for a fact she considers the yellow hair-dye wicked, and nothing shocks her more than a blackened eyebrow. Her own hair is not dyed: she only wears a false front; and what can be sounder than a false front?—except indeed a wig. Dr MacShaw himself wore a light-brown wig to the day of his death.

One day it poured incessantly, and I was kept very busy with the 'Peerage' and 'Landed Gentry.' The next day was particularly fine, and Aunt Jane was bent on the expedition to Cæsar's camp. However, she happened to wet one of her boots in a puddle on the back avenue, and Mrs Stewart immediately persuaded her she had caught a serious chill. I told Aunt Jane she was quite well, but Mrs Stewart angrily contradicted me, and Aunt Jane said, "Snipkins says I am looking ill, and now Catherine says I am not well; and, Sophy, when two people both remark you are not well, you must be ill."

So Aunt Jane stayed at home, and Mrs Stewart started for Casar's camp with Lady Arabella. On the point of starting, the thoughtful Catherine ran back into the drawing-room, just to tell Aunt Jane it was not improbable she might have to dine and sleep at Riverbank, as she rather expected to find some important papers from the East awaiting her there.

The best of women did find some papers from the East at Riverbank, for Lady Arabella came back in the carriage alone. It was late when she arrived. The dressing-bell was ringing. Her ladyship always took an hour to dress for dinner, so we were surprised to see her open the piano and begin singing. There was not much voice to be heard.

"Charming! charming!" she said; "it would suit my voice to perfection were I not martyrised by this most provoking and unaccountable relaxation of the throat."

Lady Arabella had felt the first touch of cold at an awkward moment, just when she was taking a high note with Mr Tankney. She had apologised to him, but had promised to be in better voice whenever he came to try over the part with her at Mineham. Such a sudden, unexpected seizure was indeed unfortunate!

"There must be something relaxing in the weather," exclaimed her ladyship; "for I noticed Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was in bad voice, even for her,—not that she perceived it herself!"

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! Mr Tankney! Here was a puzzle; and how Aunt Jane did wonder, to be sure!

It appeared that as Lady Arabella and Mrs Stewart were on their way to Cæsar's camp, and were just passing the gate of Harefield Abbey, Catherine had put her head out of the carriage-window, and had declared there was going to be a heavy shower of rain. "And poor dear Catherine was in a perfect agony about the horses. She said if they got wet they would catch cold, and if they caught cold Mr Sherbrook would never forgive us. Catherine quite frightened me, so I told her to drive home; but Catherine thought we had better take refuge at the Abbey. And the shower never came, after all! But we found a pleasant party at the Abbey, so in the end I was quite glad we turned back and went there. The Rigardy-Wrenstones were most kind!—most kind! Nothing could have been kinder, and Mr Wrenstone insisted on putting up the horses. The Clarke girls are staying at the Abbey, and they sang, and Mr Tankney sang. Mr Wrenstone tells me Mr Tankney is certainly to be his father's heir, and it was Lord Offaway who told him. I had heard the report before, but never on such good authority; and one always prefers to know what a person's position in the county is likely to be, for then it is so much easier to judge whether it is better to know him or to avoid his acquaintance. But now really, Mr Tankney is quite an acquisition! He is a charming tenor! and he has promised to sing at my next concert, for Catherine strongly advises me to get up a concert. Mr Tankney and I might sing one or two duets very well together,—our voices quite suit! Now that I find there is musical talent in Dullshire, I shall not let it lie idle."

Lady Arabella Scott left us the following day.

A hasty line from Mrs Stewart informed Aunt Jane that her excellent Catherine had started off unexpectedly on a short collecting tour. The change of air was taken to benefit the Cossacks. Mrs Stewart was wise to keep out of the way, as Uncle Sherbrook was much annoyed with her. In his opinion she ought to have driven home when she saw the shower coming, and ought not to have taken his carriage to the Abbey. "Oh but, Edward, the bay mare might have got wet!" said Aunt Jane; "and Denis had the horses put up; and Robert says they were kept quite warm, and given a feed of oats."

This speech of Aunt Jane's made my uncle very uncomfortable. Uncle Sherbrook feels under an obligation to any one who takes care of his horses and treats them well.

Mrs Stewart wrote edifying letters to Aunt Jane during her absence. "Really, Edward," my aunt would exclaim, "what Catherine says about the Cossacks is most interesting and encouraging. And oh, Edward, just listen! Catherine hopes the bay mare is quite well; and she says whenever she sees a light bay she always thinks of the bay mare, and hopes she has not caught cold in this unusually wet weather; for Catherine says such a wet season has not been known for years, and that eight inches of rain fell in the month of February, which she thinks is even a greater rainfall than occurred in the February of the year you were ordained, though that was a most extraordinary year! And look, Edward, Catherine sends you this separate bit of paper, on which she has written the rise and fall of the barometer, and all about the weather, during the whole month of February." My uncle would be forced to say, "Pray thank Mrs Stewart when next you write." He would accept the enclosure from Aunt Jane, and read it biliously yet attentively. Uncle Sherbrook could not pretend to take no interest in the weather.

Mrs Stewart spent a few days at Mineham before her return to Riverbank. She astonished us by coming home in very bad humour with Lady Arabella. They had almost had a quarrel. Lady Arabella was determined the concert she meant to give was to be for the blacks, while Mrs Stewart would have preferred the Christian Cossacks.

At the time I speak of, Russia was waging war in the East, and many English ladies of rank and fashion looked upon the Cossacks as the enlightened pioneers of Christian morality. I do not know how it chanced to be the fashion that a bloody aggressive war should be viewed in a pious light; I only know it was the right thing, and the new thing, to collect for the benefit of the Christian Cossack. A hundred guineas and a silk purse could be had as easily for this charity as fifty without the purse for any other. Lady Runaway and the Duchess of Wildfire had written to the papers urging the claims of the Christian Cossack.

The Duchess of Wildfire is well known in certain circles for the munificence of her gifts; but she makes a point of never giving to any Englishman unless he is very, very wicked. If one of her countrymen murders his wife, cuts her up into little pieces, puts her into a blood-stained sack, and sets her floating

down the Thames, her Grace collects for his orphans. The Duchess will make greater exertions to save a murderer's life than she would her own husband's. Then, it is true, she is separated from the Duke, and the fault is all on his side.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was very anxious to make the Duchess of Wildfire's acquaintance, and her Grace was delighted to know any one who collected for the Christian Cossack. Lady Arabella's obstinacy about the blacks proved a cruel disappointment to the best of women: she declared Lady Arabella had taken a silly, stubborn fit, and would not listen to reason; she even called her ladyship an intractable mule. Mrs Stewart was very angry, and certainly Lady Arabella's conduct was provoking; but there are great excuses to be made for her ladyship. She had been, as I might say, brought up on the blacks, educated on the blacks, in the days of Wilberforce. She had dressed dolls for little blackamoors, and had lisped hymns about pious Sambo. Her earliest ideas of right and wrong were taken from stories of black men's good deeds and white men's wicked ones. In youth and middle age she had sung for the blacks, bazaared for the blacks, collected for the blacks, until her acquaintance grew dead sick of her blacks. She was at length persuaded to let her sympathies step up the height of Africa to the Egyptians, and then cross over the water to the Turks. Lady Arabella really grew fond of the Turks when she got a pasha with a red fez to come to her parties. However, Moustapha-Koustapha Bey did not stay long in London, so Lady Arabella went back to the ophthalmic Egyptians. She never could be prevailed upon to try a really white race, not even the French infidels. She did not care a straw for white infidels, whether French or English. The nearest approach she ever made to patronising her own compatriots, was when Mrs Stewart persuaded her to give a concert in aid of the Home for Homeless Dogs.

It was now four—no, almost five—years since Lady Arabella had given a concert for the benefit of the blacks. The county must have forgotten the niggers by this time; so she was determined her concert should be for the blacks, and for no one but the blacks!

Mrs Stewart lunched at the Abbey, hoping to make Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone stick up for the Cossacks. She was much annoyed to find Jumping Georgy equally ready to sing for any charity: Jumping Georgy might perhaps have preferred singing in aid of a new harmonium for Harefield Church, but she was not particular. I heard Mrs Stewart tell Aunt Jane, Mr Fred Tankney had said he *did not care a blow* (dreadful expression!)

—he did not care a blow what he sang for, or whom he sang for—a nigger would do just as well as a Cossack for him. Aunt Jane was shocked.

Then the Clarckes had also declared they would sing for anybody—yellow, black, or white ; and Miss Warbattle had already promised Lady Arabella to play sonatas for Sambo.

I wondered to see Mrs Stewart angry and surprised at the indifference shown by all these distinguished musicians, as I had thought everybody knew the chief object of an amateur concert is that the amateurs may hear themselves, and let others hear them, play and sing.

So it was finally settled the concert should be for the blacks, and should take place in the morning, on the 19th April. The musicians were invited to Mineham for the evening of the 17th. The 18th was to be a practising day, and the party was to break up imminently after the concert.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle had constituted themselves organisers-in-chief.

Mrs Stewart was invited to Mineham as a kind of extra arranger. Lady Arabella thought she would be very useful in the general arrangement of everything—the jellies included.

I also received an invitation to Mineham. I was asked to share “dear Catherine’s” room. On these occasions everybody shared everybody else’s room. I should have liked my somebody to be anybody but herself, and I was in the very act of writing to refuse the invitation when an event occurred—the hall-door bell rang, and it was only eleven o’clock in the day !

Heavens ! what an event ! I slipped out of a side window, expecting something really important and exciting had at last happened to kill the stagnation at Sherbrook Hall. I peeped round the corner of the house, and was painfully disappointed to see Mrs Stewart seated in her mule-carriage ! I was so provoked that I turned back, and did not even care to ask why she had come at this unusual hour. But I was not left long in ignorance. Aunt Jane’s voice, resounding through the house, called “Snipkins ! Elizabeth ! Sophy ! Harriet ! Snipkins ! Sophy ! Sophy ! Edward ! oh, Edward, come ! for poor Catherine has sprained her ankle !”

Catherine had sprained her ankle ! Then it was an event, after all ! I ran into the hall. Aunt Jane, Snipkins, Elizabeth, Dan, George, and Thomas were helping Mrs Stewart from her carriage into the porch. Aunt Jane was much excited, but her Catherine was calm, and quite able to tell all about the accident. This was how it happened : Mrs Stewart was driving

towards Vottingham, when the mule took it into his head to turn round and trot homewards. She stopped him, but then she could not make him go on again ; he stood sideways across the county road. Mrs Stewart said, “ I told Dan to stay where he was, and on no account to get down, for the mule knows he is an idiot, and won’t mind him.” So Mrs Stewart hopped out of the carriage, took hold of the bit, and pulled the stubborn creature into his right place. All of a sudden the mule swerved ; Mrs Stewart slipped, fell on the muddy road, and sprained her ankle.

“ My dear Mrs Sherbrook,” said the injured Catherine, “ I just let the mule have his head, and he came here of his own accord. And now I am here, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, I don’t know how I shall ever get away again. Why, my ankle is swelling to the size of the house ! ”

“ Catherine, Catherine, there is nothing like the cold compress ! ” exclaimed Aunt Jane. “ Snipkins,” she added, nervously and in a half whisper—“ Snipkins, do you think I might tell Elizabeth to tell one of the girls to get the green room ready ? ” Snipkins assented, and with a good-humour which gave her mistress visible joy and great relief !

So Catherine took possession of the green room. Aunt Jane declared the poor dear creature could not be moved for the next three weeks. I therefore tore up the letter I had been writing, and wrote another accepting Lady Arabella’s invitation.

The sprained ankle was a real accident, and not a comedy arranged beforehand with the mule. It would be an injustice to Mrs Stewart to think otherwise. Indeed I must say she was exceedingly sorry she could not go to Mineham, and would certainly have preferred spraining her ankle after the concert had taken place. But the admirable Catherine was like the great generals we read of in history books : she changed one defeat into another victory, made new plans in the twinkling of an eye, and perceived her own advantage lying in the midst of adverse circumstances. This kind of perception is the secret of success, in peace as well as war : when women have it, they prove clever campaigners in any sort of country.

I told Aunt Jane I had written to accept Lady Arabella’s invitation. My aunt groaned aloud : “ Oh, Sophy, Sophy ! ” she cried, “ and I did not even read your letter ! and I do think this constant craving for society and excitement a very bad sign of a young person’s character ; and I am sure you have plenty of society at home. It is not as if you were shut up all alone, but you have Edward, and Catherine, and me. But, thank

God, Lady Arabella never has dancing in her house ! So if you went to Mineham as I do, and as Catherine does, not for your own selfish amusement, but as a means, under Providence, for the furtherance of a good work, I should not so much object. But you know very well, Sophy, you will listen to the music, and talk, and laugh, and I daresay laugh a great deal, though you hardly ever laugh at home, and never once will you think that you are assisting at a work of charity ! because you never took any interest in the negroes—never ! not even when you were a child, for I remember you once said to me you wished the blacks were whipped to death quickly without long prayers ; and it was a very dreadful thing to say, and I was so much shocked and pained, Sophy, that I never forgot it. But your poor dear mother encouraged you in everything ; for she never took my advice, or I will say you might have been very, very different from what you are ! ” Aunt Jane was tearful and huffy —in fact, quite an injured woman.

Uncle Sherbrook seriously thought it was too much for the horses to drive to Mineham and back twice in one week ; but Mrs Stewart cleverly persuaded him it would do the bay mare no harm if she were taken out cool, and brought in cool, and driven slowly between times.

Mrs Stewart seemed very anxious for me to go to Mineham. Her kindness puzzled me.

I had set my heart on this visit to Mineham. I was delighted to be going there alone ; indeed I was ashamed at feeling so glad to think I should be at rest away from Aunt Jane’s mind for two whole days. I longed after new ideas of any sort. I thought even new gossip must be better than old, for at least it would make one realise there were more than half-a-dozen little-minded people in the world. And then to leave Sherbrook at all was to open a gate and see beyond the prison-walls.

Before I knew it had spread its wings, my imagination took flight, and arranged interesting scenes between Mr Scott and Louisa Clarke, interwoven with complications caused by the jealousy of Mr Tankney. Howard de Vere never imagined a more thrilling tale, for I am ashamed to say I caught myself planning a duel. I tried to curb my fancy, but with ill success : seeing what it took to be a new free land so near, it escaped from me and fled.

CHAPTER XXVI.

Mineham and Sherbrook Hall are square white blocks two storeys high, with eight large windows to the front on each storey. The lower windows open to the ground. Both houses were built in the last century, and I should say by the same architect. Uncle Sherbrook's father added a porch with Corinthian columns to his house, and a semicircular wing with flattened columns about two inches thick, which, I believe, are also in the Corinthian style.

Lady Arabella's father-in-law was a man about town during the days of the Regency, so his architectural tastes were in the fashionable Eastern gimcrack-and-cupola style. When he built a new wing to Mineham, he took care it should be perfectly Chinese inside, and very Turkish outside. It had one large cupola and two small ones. The two small cupolas let in a small amount of rain, but the large one let in a great deal. Lady Arabella's jointure was sadly taxed to keep these domes in order. The Asiatic wing contains a music-room, a billiard and a dining room. These rooms could now be used, as Lady Arabella had just put the cupolas into repair. She turned the ordinary dining-room in the body of the house into a bedroom, and thus found room enough for all her guests, except the dogs: then the dogs came uninvited, so her ladyship was not to be blamed—she was only to be pitied.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone brought two pugs, Denis a colley, and Mr Tankney a colley. The two collies did not agree: at night they would escape from their masters' bedrooms and fight in the passage, to Lady Arabella's horrified alarm. Our hostess disliked dogs. I am not sure the Rigardy-Wrenstones liked them a bit better than she did. Jumping Georgy looked neither happy nor comfortable with a pug under each arm; and the colley's peculiarities gave my cousin more trouble than amusement. The fact is, the Wrenstones were not dog-fanciers; but what were they to do? Pugs and collies happened to be the "correct thing;" it was unfashionable to go about the world without them, and in really good taste to take them uninvited to a friend's house and let them dry their paws on your hostess's carpets and sofas. At least Lady Offaway always made a point of doing so; she positively went nowhere without two pugs, a large black poodle, and my lord's colley. My lord frequently left her, but the colley never did. The

Marchioness of Offaway positively could not exist without her dogs, though she could get on very well without her children. She was said to be quite too more than fond of that utterly original poodle ; she loved those quite too more than awfully ugly black-nosed pugs ; and she perfectly adored the dear colley—now positively she did !

It was therefore natural that, after a visit to Manyfields, the Rigardy-Wrenstones should discover they could go nowhere without two pugs and a colley.

Louisa Clarke made the same sort of discovery at the same time. No matter where she went, she walked, and drove, and ate, and flirted, and even sang, with a sort of small black rat under one arm. Louisa quite too more than utterly adored it ! Snarling Tiney was an awful pet of hers !—so awfully small, and so awfully clever ! and it knew so awfully well if you gave it turkey instead of chicken !

Mr Tankney wished Tiney's skin would fit him. By Jove, he would give his best racer to creep under Miss Louisa's arm, and rest for one half-hour upon her heart ! Mr Tankney said this with the bow and smile of a foreigner ; he looked like an opera-singer disguised as a groom.

Louisa told him he was "chaffing," and said, were he serious, he would begin to "bant" immediately. He replied that if he became thin enough, he never would wait till poor Tiney died,—he would skin him alive or die of jealousy. Louisa gave a little scream, kissed her utterly adorable Tiney, and declaring she quite too more than hated to be chaffed, smilingly encouraged Mr Tankney to continue in this strain of brilliant wit. She chaffed him herself to the full extent of her capacity, and indeed a little beyond it. I was amazed to hear her ; she seemed to have forced her whole nature into some new shape. Her restlessness was perhaps the greatest change I noticed in her. I gazed astounded, just as if I had seen a cold, dead, marble statue suddenly rise up and whistle and dance a horn-pipe. I wondered who Louisa had taken as her model of style and fashion. I came to the conclusion it must be Lady Offaway. It was quite too more than evident she tried to copy the language, chaff, and dash of her quite too more than notorious slangy and utterly fast ladyship. I expect the copy was worse and more ludicrous than the original : it always is—three *quite too mores* to every one of her ladyship's.

Fanny and Louisa Clarke appeared to have unhinged their heads and lost their balance during a short visit to Manyfields : their brains being topsy-turvy, the common-sense dropped out,

and was straying quite loose about their heads when I met the girls at Mineham.

Fanny's model of elegance and propriety was Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup. "That dear, delightful Sir Harry Hardup!" said she; "he is quite too more than original with his 'Cre-e-mation, Lady Offaway! but you to-*ok* that fence in style!" 'Cremation' is a delightful expression!—so utterly original! Cre-e-mation! How I should like to take a five-barred gate, and have Sir Harry at my heels! Cre-e-mation! would not I make him ride after me!"

"Cre-e-mation, Mr Tankney! would not he get an awful spill!" exclaimed Louisa. Mr Tankney laughed loudly. The girls joined in, and declared if Mr Tankney was so utterly original, they would "split" with laughter. "Now do stop, Mr Tankney!" cried Louisa; "you are positively too funny!"

"Quite too more than ridiculous!" cried Fanny.

"But I say, Miss Clarke," said Mr Tankney,—"I say, the ladies never get spilt, do they? Cremation! Never!" Fanny reddened.

"Mr Tankney! Mr Tankney!" cried Louisa, who did not even by chance address herself to any one else—"Mr Tankney, I once heard of a strapping grey, *exactly* sixteen hands high, who kicked out behind and sent some one in pink flying over her head, and some one did not wear a habit! There was a muddy ditch, and the consequences were quite too more than awful!—and the whole field looking on! Nobody laughed! no one!"

"By George, Fred!" exclaimed Rigardy-Wrenstone, "that was a cropper! The grey is a knowing one at that little game!"

My cousin was sauntering through the Chinese billiard-room at Mineham, apparently in search of his shirt-cuffs. He stopped and joined the ladies in "chaffing" Fred Tankney. There was a general interchange of "chaff," highly amusing to the "chaffers," but mostly incomprehensible to me. The two girls and Mr Tankney were more especially unintelligible: they seemed to have quite a fund of jokes in common which they understood without explanation. They "split" if Mr Tankney said, "Miss Louisa, how about the cigar?"—and replied in one breath, "Have a brandy-and-soda, and cannon your partner's ball." Whereupon Mr Tankney laughed heartily. "I say, Miss Louisa, I had a run with the Pytchley last month."

"Ex-actly! And pray, Mr Tankney, how was the lady in the blue habit? Perfect figure on a horse! Quite too more than a skeleton! quite too more!"

"I say, Miss Louisa, by Jove, that's too bad!"

"Ex-actly!" said Louisa again. Great merriment.

"It is a stiff country, Mr Tankney."

"Better have a soft fall than a hard one, Miss Louisa: less likely to get a black eye."

"That is quite too more than cruel, Mr Tankney!" Louisa pouts, and Mr Tankney laughs.

"I say, Mr Tankney," cries Fanny, "is it better to get a black eye and keep it, or lose a black boot and ride in a stocking?"

"Cremation, Miss Clarcke! it is only a gentleman's boot, which no one cares to find. A lady's top-boot is sure to turn up and get stuck on a gate, spurs and all, safe enough!"

Both girls considered this remark quite too more than utterly odious, and declared Mr Tankney was an utterly unkind man to remember everything. Mr Tankney gallantly replied that he never forgot a well-shaped boot, or a pretty foot, when it belonged to a lady.

"I say, Fred," said Denis, catching his shirt-cuff and looking down at his own tight boot—"I say, Fred, Lady Offaway has a neat foot—high instep—stylish thing!" For the next five minutes the girls and Mr Tankney chaffed Denis about his admiration for Lady Offaway and Lady Offaway's admiration for him, and about some *tête-à-tête* drive in a brougham, which had given Lord Offaway an "awful" fit of jealousy. Rigardy-Wrenstone appeared to enjoy this refined style of pleasantry, so I imagined the wit to be after the fashion of Manyfields. He retaliated by chaffing Fred about the same lady. Fred depreciated Lady Offaway, to Louisa's evident satisfaction.

"But I say, Fred," remarked Rigardy-Wrenstone—"I say, must allow, beautiful sight to see her ladyship ride across country straight as an arrow—always in the first flight! By George, beautiful sight!"

"It is beautiful," said Louisa, "to see any one ride a strapping grey ex-actly sixteen hands high!" And Fanny exclaimed, "Cre-e-mation! ex-actly sixteen hands high! Ex-actly, Mr Tankney—ex-actly!" And Rigardy Wrenstone exclaimed, "I say, Fred, ex-actly sixteen hands high! By George, ex-actly!"

Shouts of laughter, in which Mr Tankney joined. This was the joke of jokes, and the wittiest part of the joke lay in accentuating the word *ex-actly*. Indeed, if any one of the party said "ex-actly," and nothing more, the others laughed. There seemed to be irresistible wit in the word.

We were drinking afternoon tea in the Chinese billiard-room at Mineham: it is next the Chinese music-room, from whence we had been driven, teacup in hand, by Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, Miss Warbattle, and Scarlatti. The Abbey party, including Mr Tankney, had arrived about an hour before. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had appeared with a roll of music and a pug-dog under each arm. She and Miss Warbattle had immediately taken possession of the piano. As in honour bound, Lady Arabella feigned delight. "Really you are too good! too good! Losing no time, Miss Warbattle! Quite in earnest, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone! You are in charming voice, Mrs Wrenstone—charming! It is the weather, for I never felt in better voice in my life. My dear Mrs Wrenstone, we really must have some trios this evening after dinner,—now really, we must! *En attendant*, if you are tired, Miss Warbattle, I shall only be too delighted to accompany Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone."

Jumping Georgy said "Thankee!" rather shortly. Miss Warbattle also thanked her ladyship, but did not leave the piano or tire of accompanying Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone.

Poor Lady Arabella hovered about the coveted instrument for some little time, exclaiming that she adored Scarlatti, and considered you never thoroughly enjoyed him unless you played his music yourself. Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone were so completely engrossed by their own performance, that I can quite believe they never heard Lady Arabella's little hints.

My lady soon tired of adoring Scarlatti at a distance from the pianoforte, so shortly disappeared. The hanging-gardens of Babylon were all the more elaborate that evening, because her ladyship had taken two hours instead of one to dress.

When Lady Arabella left us, we had carried our teacups into the billiard-room. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone practised in a painfully conscientious manner. She thought nothing of repeating a bar fifteen times. You were not surprised to hear her practise on for ever: scales, shakes, and twists soon became a second nature to your ear. But if the great amateur sang a difficult passage once, and did not sing it again, then astonishment took possession of your soul.

The world keeps turning unceasingly, and we none of us remark it; but if the world stood still, all men would raise a cry of wonder.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone ran up a scale and caught the top note. She never came down again! She was silent!

"Cremation!" cried Fanny and Louisa, "Georgina has stopped singing!"

“Cremation!” cried Mr Tankney, “Mrs Wrenstone not singing!”

“By George!” cried my cousin, “Scarlatti smashed up!”

“Ex-actly!” cried the other three.

We all ran into the music-room wondering what could have happened. There we perceived Mr David Scott and another gentleman. They had entered on the top of the high note. I looked at Louisa to see how she would meet Mr Scott. This meeting, thought I, may be the first chapter in the most complicated part of the romance.

Louisa pretended not to see the man to whom she had once been engaged, and yet she seemed intensely conscious of his presence. There was an excuse for her blindness in the twilight of the room.

Mr Tankney, wearing the air of a smirking foreigner, pressed forward to shake hands with Mr Scott. Mr Scott gave him one finger.

Louisa walked over to the fireplace and stood alone, apparently gazing up at the Chinese dragons and bells on the pagoda-like chimney-piece—a strange erection, built in narrowing layers till the topmost one reached the ceiling almost in a point.

I saw Mr David Scott glance eagerly round the half-lighted room. He has a speaking face, and a quick, impatient eye,—a singularly expressive countenance; one you will look at and not pass over, if you care to read a man's thoughts in his face. He saw Louisa. He walked hastily across the room, and went up to her, and greeted her warmly with a kind of joyful anxiety, as if he were glad to see her, and hoped eagerly, yet anxiously, that she felt glad to see him. Louisa did not speak. She cast down her eyes, and would not even look at her old lover. Perhaps she feared her heart might melt towards him; for nature had not made her a hard woman, but rather a soft, weak one, easily swayed by others. Mr Tankney watched her closely, and went up to her and spoke to her. She started, and quickly withdrew her hand from David Scott's, for she seemed to have forgotten it in his.

From the moment Louisa heard Mr Tankney's voice, she became his slave. She was a changed woman. Her noisy excitement returned. Cremation! Mr Tankney chaffed her. Cremation! she chaffed him.

Mr Scott was struck dumb with amazement. He stared in mute astonishment at Louisa, as if she frightened him—as if he did not know her. Perhaps “cremation” was a new word to him, or perhaps he had never before seen the soft die-away in

this "chaffing," slangy humour. I must say she was ridiculous: she quite amused me. "Cremation," lisped by her pretty lips, would have set me laughing, had I not seen that her loud and strangely vulgar fastness was a sorrow—nay, more, a tragedy—to the man I had heard once loved her well.

Louisa turned abruptly from Mr Scott, and went off into the billiard-room to have a *tête-à-tête* game with Mr Tankney, just till the dressing-bell rang. Mr Scott made as if he would go too, but Louisa replied to his evident intention by taking Mr Tankney's arm. Mr Fred offered her a cigar.

"Thanks awfully!" said she, and took it. Mr Tankney lighted his cigar, and Louisa proceeded to light hers from his: their foreheads touched.

Mr Scott stood motionless, and gazed after Louisa from the doorway. I think she felt his eye upon her. We do feel the gaze of an eager eye. She turned and caught his look of scorn. She wavered. Mr Tankney whispered in her ear, and she laughed, gave a puff to the cigar, and stepping forward, offered it with a low courtesy to Mr Scott.

He said nothing, looked at her, and walked away. Never had I seen a man's face speak such strong disgust, and such painful, angry sorrow. I was grieved for him.

"I say, Scott," said Denis, in a whispered aside—"I say, Scott, who is your friend? You forgot to introduce him."

My cousin's question greatly surprised me. When I had arrived at Mineham, Lady Arabella had apologised (quite unnecessarily, I thought) for her nephew's absence, and had told me he had been obliged to go off with Lord Hartmoor, to look at some horse belonging to a farmer who lived at the other side of the county. Lord Hartmoor had come down from town quite unexpectedly, and Lady Arabella said she thought he would most likely dine at Mineham, and return to London by the ten o'clock train. So I naturally concluded Mr Scott's companion could be no one but Lord Hartmoor.

When I found the stranger and Denis were unknown to each other, I thought I surely must be mistaken, for I had heard Denis speak of "Hartmoor," and mention him in one breath with Furley, Castletower, and Dumbledore. Indeed old Colonel Talbot once told Uncle Sherbrook a story Denis was reported to have enlivened the club with: the tale was a little comedy, in which Hartmoor, Edinburgh, Wales, and Rigardy-Wrenstone were the chief actors.

Conceive, then, my astonishment when I heard Mr Scott reply, "Why, that's Hartmoor. Surely, Wrenstone, you know

Hartmoor? Not know Hartmoor? I could have sworn I had heard you speak of him."

It was on occasions like this one, that Denis was truly admirable. His first introduction to Lord Hartmoor must have been a surprise to all present, even to his own wife; yet Rigardy-Wrenstone's ease of manner remained perfectly unabashed.

Lord Hartmoor is a florid, reddish-haired man,—a heavy-weight. He has two ideas in his head—one on the subject of Durhams, and the other on the increasing difficulty there is in getting good mounts for a heavy-weight. He deplored the old times, when he had heard his father say you could pick up just what you wanted for a mere song. He remembered the points of all the horses he had ever bought, and he bought all his horses himself. His lordship declared he would not trust his best friend to buy him a horse. "Or to sell you one either," said Rigardy-Wrenstone. Lord Hartmoor laughed heartily at this remark, and declared it was the very best thing he had heard this long time. Not that I expect a long time had really elapsed since he had enjoyed this identical witticism. I hear it is a standard one amongst sporting men; and then, I am quite sure Lord Hartmoor never in the whole course of his life, laughed the first time he heard a joke.

It was not by instinct I knew the worthy Lord Hartmoor had only two ideas in his head. I learnt this fact from hearing the conversation Denis managed to keep up with him during dinner-time.

Rigardy-Wrenstone sat next me at table, but naturally preferred talking to Lord Hartmoor; and greatly to Lady Arabella's relief! She seemed grateful to Denis for talking so much, as she herself had not a word for her cousin: he appeared to bore her intensely. Rigardy-Wrenstone's quickness of perception struck me as being nothing short of miraculous: he really did seem to know by instinct that a good mount for a heavy-weight and well-bred Durhams, were the only ideas in Lord Hartmoor's mind which could find words to speak with.

I was glad to have Denis next me at dinner. As he talked across the table to Lord Hartmoor, he had to speak loud, and so covered his neighbour's silence. I therefore did not feel obliged to keep on talking incessantly under difficulties, and Miss Warbattle was a very difficult person to talk to. She sat at my right hand. Fanny Clarcke sat next her; but she was occupied in helping Louisa to entertain that quite too more than original Mr Fred Tankney.

Miss Warbattle ate in silence, and from her look I had thought she would rather not be spoken to; but I had caught an anxious glance from our hostess, and so had taken courage, and had said, "Miss Warbattle . . . this . . . this has been the finest day we have had for a week."

"I beg your pardon?" replied Miss Warbattle, shortly.

"Oh, I only said this was a fine day, Miss Warbattle. It has been rather wet the last week."

"Miss Thursley, I make a point of never remarking the weather." I felt decidedly snubbed, and was dumb.

After a lapse of ten minutes my neighbour suddenly asked me if I admired Schumann. Much surprised to hear her speak, I looked at her to see if really she had spoken, and I thought the Warbattle nose the longest and sternest feature I had ever seen hanging to a woman's face. There is something in a very marked and serious countenance which is apt to lash one into flippancy, so I said, "I beg your pardon, Miss Warbattle?" though I had heard what she had said, as well as she had heard my remark about the weather. Miss Warbattle asked me again if I admired Schumann. Her solemn voice was pitched in a minor key: "Do you admire Schumann?" I replied that I considered some of Schumann's songs "quite too more" than exquisitely beautiful, and some of his compositions also; but I added flippantly, there were a whole set of heavy pieces, generally the ones termed "posthumous" in a concert programme, which Schumann really did seem to have composed in his grave. "They are fearfully learned, and rather heavy," said I.

Miss Warbattle did not speak to me again. Her solemn silence and the Warbattle nose awed me. I held my tongue, and was thenceforth blind to Lady Arabella's beseeching glances. Really, while Denis was talking for all of us, I did not feel obliged by good manners to make any superhuman efforts at conversation.

Rigardy-Wrenstone continued to entertain Lord Hartmoor until the dessert was on the table. His lordship seemed surprised at his own agreeability. He had to leave early, and departed thanking Lady Arabella for a very pleasant evening. It was a cold, wet night, and Denis had dressed for dinner; yet he insisted on accompanying Hartmoor and Scott to the railway station, though he had to go outside, as the chariot only held two.

"Really, Sophy," said Lady Arabella, "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone is the most good-natured man I know, and the pleasant-

est! So kind of him to entertain that dull Hartmoor!" Lady Arabella addressed herself to me, I being the only listener left her.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle had rushed from the dinner-table to the piano, and were just "trying over" once again that "little thing of Scarlatti's." The two Clarckes and Mr Tankney sat sideways on a three-seated back-to-back ottoman. There was no fourth place for Lady Arabella.

"Really," repeated her ladyship, "Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone was a god-send to-night! He kept the table alive, for no one else had a word to say except Mrs Wrenstone's] cousins, those two Miss Clarckes; and . . ." Lady Arabella dropped her voice . . . "and they completely monopolised Mr Tankney—completely monopolised him. He was no earthly use for general conversation—none whatever. And I am so short of gentlemen!" Lady Arabella then complained bitterly of Mr David Scott's unaccountable silence. "And he can talk to any one if he likes to exert himself: so I sent him down on purpose with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and there he sat like a deaf mute; and I shall have Mrs Wrenstone in a huff, and she is my chief soprano. David might at least have tried Schumann with her. She and Miss Warbattle will always talk of Schumann."

"Schumann!" I said. "Oh, Lady Arabella, Schumann is a very serious subject—fearfully and wonderfully serious! I, for one, will never try that subject again with Miss Warbattle."

"It is only her manner, my dear—it is only her manner," exclaimed Lady Arabella. "It is just the Warbattle nose, and the spectacles; but she does not really intend to snub people, and you must not think so, my dear—for now, really, you must talk to Miss Warbattle. I ask it as a favour, for those Miss Clarckes will not be bored speaking to a lady, and the gentlemen don't care for Miss Warbattle. She is not in their style." Lady Arabella put her head on one side and smiled, as if conscious there was at least one lady in the world whom all gentlemen liked to entertain. She repeated, "Not in their style. You cannot make them care for her. But, my dear girl," she continued, "try Scarlatti next time, I implore you, like a dear good creature. Musical geniuses are so easily huffed. One must keep them in good-humour." Lady Arabella sighed, made a slight motion upwards of her hands and eyes, and looked despairingly towards the piano. I do not think Lady Arabella altogether enjoyed having such a pair of serious musicians in

her house as Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, for they seemed seriously disposed only to accompany each other.

As to Miss Warbattle, she certainly is the most sternly serious woman I have ever met. The musical purpose of life is to her a very serious end pursued in a severely classical spirit. She permits no trifling of any sort, and enjoys, as far as it is in her nature to enjoy, the satisfaction of boring an unappreciative audience with a very long "posthumous." The idea of suiting a programme to an audience would to her, be like the notion of changing your religion if you asked a Roman Catholic to dinner. She manages *the Society of Amateur Musicians*, and only permits her amateurs to admire what she considers admirable. Miss Warbattle is said to be under the impression that she and *the Society* virtually lead the musical opinion of the United Kingdom. No wonder, then, if the terrible responsibility of this high position has sobered her. She is said to be a great authority amongst the leading professionals, and is commonly supposed to have injured her eyesight by deciphering the manuscript music of ancient unknown composers. Whatever living musicians think of Miss Warbattle, there can be no doubt the dead must hold her in high esteem. I myself go so far as to believe that every now and then Schumann composes a good, heavy "posthumous" specially for her, and sends it up to her from below with his kind regards.

When Miss Warbattle got to the piano, she never could leave it. When Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone once began to sing, she could not stop.

Lady Arabella's annoyance was fast growing into irrepressible irritation. She gave a small cough, and sang a few bars with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. I heard her, but no one else seemed to hear her, not even Mr Tankney; and I am sure Lady Arabella expected Mr Tankney at least would pay her some attention. But those two provoking Clarke girls continued to monopolise him, and he still appeared to be making himself quite too more than utterly original.

Lady Arabella dropped her fan. It was I who pieked it up; for, sad to say, I alone saw her drop it.

At length Lady Arabella's patience was exhausted, and up she rose from her chair with an angry rustle of ribbons. Luckily, Mr Tankney saw her, and immediately rose to meet her. "What, Lady Arabella!" he said, "do you expeet Lord Hartmoor again? and are you going to run away? How cruel you ladies are to the agreeable men!"

Intentionally or unintentionally, Mr Tankney gave Lady

Arabella just what she wanted—a subject she could spend her passing little fit of ill-humour upon. “Oh indeed, Mr Tankney!” exclaimed her ladyship, “if it had not been for Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone, I should have died of Hartmoor. I quite dreaded him! He is a man I never can drag a conversation from. I call him my cattle plague! and really, in a *tête-à-tête* he is an infliction. I have often tried him, and given him every chance; but would you believe it, Mr Tankney?”—this was said in a softened tone—“would you believe it? he cannot even pay a compliment! Now really, he cannot!”

Mr Tankney took the hint, and made Lady Arabella a few of the little speeches Lord Hartmoor ever failed to make.

Mr Tankney seemed to be paying her ladyship the most charming compliments, and plenty of them. I went to sit beside the Clarckes, so I did not hear what he said; but I perceived my lady's vanity soon recovered its good spirits. Mr Tankney's manner to Lady Arabella was not noisy, but softly insinuating, as if he were acting lover to the elderly widow of the piece. There was something decidedly theatrical about Mr Tankney, or rather, I should say, operatic, because black hair, dark eyes, and a yellow skin, with the features, thick-set neck, and figure of an Italian peasant, remind one more of the opera than of the theatre.

Mr Tankney minced and mouthed English words like a foreigner. His accent was an attraction to some people. The Clarckes and Wrenstones considered it “so interesting.” Louisa pronounced it “quite too more than pretty—so awfully refined and so utterly original!” Then, at the time I speak of, Miss Louisa's friends fully intended her to marry Lord Tankney's heir, and she herself had no objection to the match.

As for me, I took a violent dislike to Mr Tankney from the first moment I saw him. I thought him the most vulgar man I had ever met, and so impertinently affectionate to ladies. I could not endure him. He was no gentleman.

I marvelled to see Lady Arabella take his compliments with eager delight, for I could not believe she could like a man of such bad style and second-rate manners. She puzzled me. I have since discovered, Lady Arabella makes it a rule in life never to let herself dislike the possessor of a good tenor voice. She considers her own soprano is not heard to advantage in a duet with any other kind of voice.

Mr Tankney's compliments were not merely flowers of speech, embellished by French and Italian words, and made “so interesting” by a foreign accent. He led Lady Arabella to the

piano, thereby proving he knew the art of practical flattery. A lady of sixty has real pleasure in singing with a young man of twenty-three.

I heard Mr Tankney say, "Our voices, Lady Arabella, were created for each other."

"Quite true, Mr Tankney—quite true; for I always will uphold that a baritone or a bass is a bad match for a high soprano—*un parti bourgeois*, as the French would say."

"And surely, Lady Arabella, the French would add that between a soprano and a tenor *il y a un mariage d'inclination*." Mr Tankney bowed low, and with his hand upon his heart, he said, "*Et d'une inclination très-inclinée!*"

"Dear me, Mr Tankney," said her ladyship, "you do so remind me of my poor dear *marquis türk*—a charming man; and he spoke French like a Frenchman. Everything sounds nice in French. Delightful language! It is *si bien tourné*, that you can go to the French play and hear all sorts of queer things, and not be a bit shocked; but it would not do at all in English—so coarse and vulgar, you know. If it were not for the French genders, I should never speak a word of English."

The delightful fact that everything which is so queer in English—so coarse and vulgar, you know—becomes perfectly *bien tourné* in French, is a favourite subject with Lady Arabella, and apparently an inexhaustible one. Her ladyship leant against the piano and talked volubly.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone said, "Hush!" Miss Warbattle said, "Hush!"—a severe, decided "Hush!" Yet Lady Arabella did not hear them. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone put up her eye-glass; Miss Warbattle peered through her spectacles over the top of her music-book. The great musicians saw Lady Arabella, and hesitated to silence their hostess. Their perplexity amused me. They whispered together. Jumping Georgy drew herself up and stepped away from the piano; Miss Warbattle stopped playing.

"Charming!" exclaimed Lady Arabella, the instant the music ceased—"charming! Such an exquisite little thing of Scarlatti's."

"We have latterly been singing Schumann's music," said Miss Warbattle, sternly.

"Sweetly pretty!—sweetly pretty!" cried Lady Arabella; "suits your voice to perfection, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone; and as to the accompaniment, Miss Warbattle, *il n'y a pas à redire!* Now really, Mr Tankney, we must try our duet."

Mr Tankney, gesticulating like a lover at the opera, sang,

“*T'amo, t'amo, con furor, bell' angiol d' amor,*” in a fine, thrilling tenor voice. Lady Arabella screamed, in reply, “*Traditor! traditor! il cuor mi trema. Crudel! mi trema il cu-or, il cu-or-or!*”

The trembling of Lady Arabella's *cu-or-or* was interrupted by a sharp howl. The instant Lady Arabella began to sing, Tiney began to whine. Her voice affected his nerves. The whine rose with Lady Arabella's *cu-or-or*, and turned into a howl as her ladyship's voice reached the top of the scale.

Ever since dinner, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's two pugs had been sleeping quietly under the piano. Tiney's howl disturbed their rest. They came out to see what was the matter. Louisa chastised and kissed, and kissed and chastised, her utterly adorable but quite too more than awfully impertinent little black sweetkin of a naughty-aughty doggy-woggy.

Lady Arabella recommenced her duet with Mr Tankney. While he sang, the utterly adorable black rat was quiet; but the instant Lady Arabella opened her mouth, Tiney opened his. Perhaps it was the sad contrast between the rich young voice and the poor old worn-out squeak which set the dog howling. Tiney escaped from Louisa's hand, jumped on a chair, sat up all by himself, and howled as if in pain—as if imploring Lady Arabella to stop. The two pugs suddenly joined their voices to his; and such a barking and howling I never did hear! At this moment Perkins brought in the tea-tray, and my cousin's colley came bounding in through the open door. He was received with a cry of horror from the unhappy lady of the house. “My old china!” she cried—“my china! my china!” The colley enjoyed the general excitement, and barked from pure delight. Before he could be caught, he had raced round the room after the two pugs, and had taken a flying leap over the tea-table. He fortunately only broke one cup and a saucer, and every one except Lady Arabella, declared the high jump was a beautiful sight. At length the butler collared the dog, and the colley was dragged from the room. Lady Arabella begged the other dogs might follow him, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone actually permitted Perkins to take away the two pugs. I gave her great credit for doing so. I thought she was highly to be commended; for it was well known in the county that Lady Offaway never tolerated any such insult to her pets. She had, as a fact, dropped the Pastley's acquaintance merely because Mrs Pastley had objected to having my lord's colley and my lady's poodle in her drawing-room at the same time as my lady's two pugs.

Lady Arabella remarked there was something in Mr Tank-

ney's voice which affected the dogs. "Some animals have very sensitive nerves. *C'est unique!*"

Louisa would not consent to a separation between herself and that quite too more than original Tiney-iney. Positively she could not bear Tiney out of her sight!—now positively she could not! With Mr Tankney's help (she could not do it without) she tied up Tiney's little-ittle muzzle-uzzle in her handkerchief; she tucked the utterly adorable under her arm, and went into the billiard-room.

Fanny proposed to follow her, and asked me to come too. "Louisa," said she, "will be deadly dull—dull as ditchwater! for now that Lady Arabella has kidnapped Mr Tankney, there is no one to chaff. Louisa is an awfully bad listener—awfully! But you look as if you ought to listen well, Sophy, for I don't suppose you have much conversation of your own. How could you? when I hear you positively go nowhere! And if a girl does not go out regularly, she can't have anything to say. She must be awfully slow! for if you never go to balls or parties, you don't know who is paying attention to whom, or what people look like, or what they wear; and that is just exactly what everybody talks about. Whoever talks of anything else?"

I felt the truth of these words, and I knew I must seem very old and dull to girls of my own age. I was sorry for it. The feeling made me shy.

"But come on," said Fanny, "and we will sit together, for I like talking to any one better than to no one; and we can talk to our heart's content in there, and they will never hear us at the piano."

I followed Fanny. We found Louisa seated sideways on exactly the same sort of back-to-back ottoman she had been sitting upon in the drawing-room. I wondered at her choosing the only uncomfortable, break-neck seat in the room. Moreover, the ottoman was strewn with billiard-balls, and cues were propped up against the raised cushion in the middle. Fanny began removing the balls and cues. I asked why she did not take a chair?

"I prefer the ottoman," said Fanny, in a very decided tone.

"You look uneomfortable, Louisa, turned crookedways," I remarked; "here is a chair for you."

"Thanks, awfully!" she answered, "but I would rather stay where I am."

I drew a chair and sat in front of the ottoman, as I did not like the trouble of twisting my neck at every word.

"All very well for you, Sophy, to sit straight up on a chair," said Fanny ; "you are so little tied in." Lousia turned round her head and threw a glance over my dress ; so did Fanny.

"You do not get your things from Monsieur Soieton, do you ?" asked Louisa, with just the slightest little sneer imaginable. It was strange to see a sneer on her pretty doll's face.

I confessed that Monsieur Soieton's name even was unknown to me.

"Never heard of Monsieur Soieton of Paris!" cried Fanny ; "quite too more than utterly miraculous ! Why, Monsieur Soieton is the only person in the world who knows what really is the fashion. You leave everything to him. He won't let you interfere : but if you are thin enough, he ties you in to perfection ; and if you are stout, he will tie you in better than any one else. You have to wait hours for him, and in the end you can't always see him ; but he invariably sees *us* himself. He takes an awful amount of trouble, and asks you all sorts of questions. He is so particular about your stays !—so awfully particular about everything, and won't let you wear any petticoats ! Now, positively he won't. The Americans are his best customers, for they are awfully rich, and perfect skeletons ; and they pay any amount, and tie in beautifully. They always dress in the very height of the fashion, and Louisa was told they never sat down in their best gowns, not even sideways."

"Some people are positively too awkward !" remarked Louisa, stifling a yawn.

"Quite too more than awfully ridiculous !" exclaimed Fanny ; "I say, Louisa, like the Pastley girls !"

"They are so awfully slow !" said Louisa, with another yawn.

"Cre-e-mation !" replied Fanny ; "and what colours they do wear !—quite too more than awful ! quite too more !"

Louisa exerted herself sufficiently to say—"With their bad complexions it is no matter what they wear. They could not look well in anything."

"Ex-actly," said Fanny ; "and still, Mary is married and Emily is engaged."

Louisa answered, almost with animation, that she could not imagine what Mr Vernon found to admire in Mary Pastley.

"She has not even good eyes like Emily," said Fanny ; "and if she is amiable, it is merely because she is plain."

"Perhaps she is clever," said I.

"Men hate clever women !" cried the two girls in a breath ; "they never marry clever women !"

"Sophy, you know nothing of life!" added Fanny; "you are quite too more than ludicrous! quite too more!"

"Thanks, awfully!" said I—"awfully!"

At this moment Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone came in from the next room, stepping very high. Her face wore an expression of annoyance: Lady Arabella and Mr Tankney had begun another duet. In this hour of trial, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone looked as if she found it impossible to sit still. Fanny appealed to her. "We are wondering, Georgina," she said, "what on earth possessed Mr Vernon to marry Mary Pastley."

"Can't tell," replied Jumping Georgy, crossly; "the girl did not know one note from another. She sang out of tune, and she had neither fortune nor title to carry it off." These last words were said with much irritation of manner. The Drill-sergeant turned right-about-left, and pranced back into the music-room.

"Dear me!" thought I, "you have more visible human nature in you than six ordinary women!"

Louisa said any one could see Georgina expected to monopolise Mr Tankney, and declared Georgina was quite too more than ridiculous. "Mr Tankney," she said, "wants to sing with me next. He told me, as soon as ever he had killed off Lady Arabella, he and I were to try our duet."

I asked what duet they would sing?

"Oh!" cried Fanny, "Louisa has only two. It is the one she used to sing with David Scott."

"I do wonder," exclaimed Louisa, "if he will be back by then. I do so hope he won't, for I can see he is awfully jealous!"

There was something in the way she hoped Mr Scott would not come back in time for the duet, which made me think she really hoped he would.

Fanny was of the same opinion. "Nonsense, Louisa!" she said, "you delight in making him jealous. You are dying to tease him; now you know you are!"

Louisa declared Fanny was quite too more than odiously unkind! quite too more!

"Ex-actly!" exclaimed Fanny—"ex-actly!"

Although Louisa again repeated, "Quite too more than odious! quite too more!" she brightened up in the most astonishing manner. Her spirits rose, she became lively, and began talking with Fanny of a ball they had lately been at. They both agreed it was an "awfully dull affair! no men!" and Louisa declared she hated going out—"awful bore!" Still, she discussed with unmistakable interest the dress and personal appearance of all the ladies and most of the gentleman at the ball.

Louisa and Fanny were lenient towards ugly men, but very severe upon the plain ladies; they called them "dumpy frights" or "angular guys. Such awful bores, you know! The men won't dance with them, so they turn into a set of gossiping wall-flowers, hear all you say, see all you do—awful nuisance!"

"I detest ugly people," said Fanny.

"I abhor them," said Louisa. "I never do pretend to endure them; and as to a cripple, why, if I see one, I have no appetite for a week! I am just like Lady Offaway, who had a son with a short leg, and never could sit in the room with it. Luckily, it is dead now."

Both girls seemed proud of detesting any sort of fright. They spoke as if to hate ugliness were a sign of high-breeding and fashion. Louisa fanned herself with an air of superior good taste, and still more, of conscious beauty.

The two Clarckes compared notes, and judged the ladies they had met according to their figure, eyes, nose, mouth, and hair. Cre-e-mation! how they pitied the "men," who had to be civil to the old ladies and the plain girls!

"Such a pack of old Dows!" cried Louisa.

"Such a pack of young Dows!" cried Fanny.

Louisa exclaimed—"Poor Mr Tankney! he had to take in Miss Brabazon to supper!"

"She has such a bad complexion and such wretched little eyes!" said Fanny; "awful bore for Mr Tankney!"

Louisa remarked pettishly that Mr Tankney was not to be pitied, "for he could not flatter the old Dows in French and in English as he does, if he had any sort of eye." Fanny disagreed with her sister, but Louisa remained of opinion that Mr Tankney was no great slave to beauty. "Nothing to David Scott!" said she, and only wondered how David Scott ever spoke to a plain woman at all. "How they do bore him!" she said; "it is never he who speaks to them—it is they who speak to him!"

"Ex-actly!" exclaimed Fanny: "all very fine to say pretty girls are awful flirts! the plain girls would be greater ones if anybody would flirt with them!"

"Cre-e-mation!" cried one Miss Clarke, "only fancy a man flirting with Lucy Hay!"

"Or with Alice Bingham!" cried the other.

"Or with me!" thought I.

I saw Louisa look at me, and for the first time since my mother's death I remembered my commonplace appearance. I had quite forgotten I was a plain woman. Other thoughts and

worries had filled my mind of late years. I knew I felt stupid and heavy-souled, but there was nothing at Sherbrook Hall to remind me I was ugly. The crows on the back avenue were accustomed to me ; the Sherbrooks and Mrs Stewart knew me by heart—they took me for granted as an accepted fact, and it never entered their head to remark my looks, or to reason about my face and figure.

The two girls talked on, and often talked together.

“Alice Bingham ! regular green eyes !”

“They say she is clever.”

“Because she is such a fright !”

“Such a bad figure !”

“Who was she with ?”

“The Perceval-Spencers, and she introduced me to the girls.”

“And what did you think of them ?”

“I did not care for the eldest ; she has prominent teeth, and her upper lip is a mere cover-gum, and nothing more : but I did not dislike the younger one ; she does not look badly in blue.”

“Light blue ?”

“Yes, the new shade.”

“By the by, was not it their brother who ran away from his wife last week ? She was the person we met at the Marshalls’, who had the waist and the double chin, and who was so ridiculously fond of him.

“But he only married her for her money.”

“Poor fellow !” sighed Louisa ; “no wonder he went off with a beauty like Lady Emily Dane, though she is the fastest woman in London.”

“Whatever Lady Emily may be,” replied Fanny, “she certainly is not bad-looking.”

“Real violet eyes !” said Louisa.

“Yes,” said Fanny ; “one hears of a great many people who are supposed to have violet eyes, and who have not—but she has.”

“Lady Emily is an awfully brave woman—awfully !” exclaimed Louisa ; “she always wears the most trying colours !”

“Captain Joulter was a great admirer of hers before she married Colonel Dane.”

“Poor dear Captain Joulter ! He is a regular Apollo ! six-feet-four !—and quite too more than original ! quite too more !”

“Ex-actly !” cried Fanny ; “how he does abhor plain people ! but he never calls them ugly. If you show him a complete fright, he says she is a very good-natured girl.”

And Louisa exclaimed, "Captain Joulter has a tremendous eye for beauty. He is awfully critical!"

"He does not admire Mary King."

"Or Gertrude Bruce."

"Oh dear, no! I should rather think not. But Captain Joulter says he won't call Gertrude Bruce actually good-natured; he only calls her clever and agreeable."

"Well, I do declare that's too bad!" cried Louisa; "for now really, she ties in well!"

"Yes," said Fanny, "she ties in well. I rather like her."

I perceived to "tie in well" was some atonement for the crime of ugliness; it seemed to be the only one a girl could make.

"Cre-e-mation!" exclaimed both Clarkes, jumping up. Lousia jumped so quickly that she cracked a string. "Cre-e-mation!" they exclaimed, "here are the men back again! they are both in the music-room."

"What a bore!" added Louisa.

"And here's Mr Tankney," said Fanny; "he is coming to claim your song, Louisa, so David Scott will hear the duet. And you are enchanted—quite too more than delighted! Now you know you are, Louisa—you know you are!"

But Louisa declared it was an awful bore—awful!

When Mr Tankney came up to her, and reminded her in flattering terms of the duet she had promised to sing with him, I heard her tell him that now really she could not sing, for that now really she had no voice to-night—now really she had not; it was awfully weak—awfully: and that she had quite too more than an odious cold—quite too more! Her exclamations provoked a shower of little compliments from Mr Tankney. Louisa yielded visibly but slowly, requiring much small flattery to persuade her. At length she allowed Mr Tankney to lead her into the music-room, but she just got there in time to be too late. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone had that moment taken full possession of the piano.

The Drill-sergeant insisted upon having a trio to begin with.

"Mrs Wrenstone is so odd!" croaked Lady Arabella in my ear; "she is dying to make up a match between that very fast young cousin of hers and Mr Tankney; and she must know there is nothing like a duet for helping on that sort of little arrangement, and yet she will sing herself! She is always bent on singing herself. *Et ce n'est qu'une voix d'art.*" I think these were Lady Arabella's exact words; but I am not quite sure, as I had the greatest difficulty in catching them, owing to

her hoarseness. She sipped water, and whispered that the horrid damp weather had quite affected her throat.

When the trio came to an end, Jumping Georgy would sing a solo. After the first solo, she sang a second; and then Miss Warbattle proposed she and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone should just try over that wonderful composition of Brahms with the voice accompaniment. The wonderful composition was no short effort of genius.

Louisa betrayed much annoyance during the first solo, and even remarked that the piano "or something" was out of tune. But when Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone began a second song, Louisa perceived the case to be hopeless. She made the best of her trying circumstances. She beckoned to Mr Tankney, and went into the next room. She took care to sit near the folding-doors, in a place from whence she had a good view of Mr Scott, and where he could not fail to see her. She made up for not singing with Mr Tankney by flirting with him. Lady Arabella whispered, "*En attendant, Sophy, a tête-à-tête* is no great waste of time."

I could see Louisa eagerly watched the effect upon Mr Tankney of her every smile and gesture. She exclaimed, loud enough for me to hear, "I say, Mr Tankney, how awfully jealous men are! Positively, you can't speak to one man without driving another to the very verge of suicide; now, positively you can't! It is so ridiculous! quite too more than ridiculous!"

As Louisa spoke, I followed her eyes, and saw they fell on David Scott's grieved, indignant face. His countenance is one which expresses strong feeling powerfully. Undoubtedly Louisa had managed to arouse his jealous anger. Such an awful bore for Louisa!—awfully awful! Still, it was a sort of boredom which did not depress, but rather excited her. She in nowise discouraged Mr Tankney's exaggerated attentions. Her lazy blue eyes quite sparkled: the flush upon her cheek became her, and I am sure Mr Tankney told her so. He whispered in her ear, leant over her, and put his arm round the back of her chair in the most free-and-easy manner. He was a vulgar man. I pitied Mr Scott for having so ill-bred a rival,—a man not to be compared to himself, either in manner or appearance,—one who was only favoured so highly on account of his "good expectations," as they were called. I thought there must be more bitterness for the heart in feeling our rival is contemptibly our inferior, than if we felt he is worthier or has some greater charm than we. I thought so then; I do not think so now.

Lady Arabella did not like Mr Tankney's manner. She looked annoyed, and whispered that Mr Tankney forgot "he was not at the opera." The words had barely escaped her lips when she corrected herself, and said, as clearly as she could, "I mean it is Miss Louisa who forgets where she is. Such open flirtation is always the lady's fault—always. But I am very glad David sees her; he will believe his own eyes. Catherine said he would, and . . ." Lady Arabella continued talking, but grew so hoarse I could understand no more. Finally, she had to sip her glass of water in silence till bedtime, or rather until Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone finished their "rendering" of Brahms' wonderful composition. By then it was nearer the time people usually get up than the hour they should go to bed.

CHAPTER XXVII

No one came down much before eleven o'clock next morning, except Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle. These indefatigable musicians rose early, and tried over that great sonata of Schumann's, that little thing of Scarlatti's, and that wonderful composition of Brahms. They were very proud of their early rising and musical energy, and were sanguine about the success of the concert. Miss Warbattle hoped to raise the musical taste of Dullshire to the exalted level of the Society of Amateur Musicians; but Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone knew it would take more than one concert to "drum" a taste for really good music into the heads of a set of people who went wild about that Miss Elmer's *solfeggi*. "We ought to give a series of concerts," said she.

Mr David Scott did the honours of the breakfast-table in the absence of his aunt. He was neither in good nor in bad spirits: he seemed slightly irritated by the foreign burr in Mr Tankney's accent, but that was all. I had expected a state of dismal despair or of jealous rage; and there was Mr Scott eating his breakfast like any ordinary man! He hardly appeared to see that Louisa flirted more than ever with Mr Fred Tankney. I was puzzled.

Rigardy-Wrenstone was what Fanny called "in great form." He kept up a flow of unceasing talk. Hartmoor had said many sensible things to him, and he had made many remarks to Hart-

moor, well worthy of repetition. He patronised everybody, and even patronised me. He inquired affectionately for the Sherbrooks, and especially for my uncle ; in fact, he spoke as if his nearest neighbour were also his best friend. He told us Hartmoor had inquired for Sherbrook, and had said Sherbrook was a distant cousin of his. Hartmoor had wanted to know if Sherbrook did not live at this side of the county, and had asked why he never came to town now. "I will tell Sherbrook Hartmoor inquired for him," said my cousin.

After breakfast Miss Warbattle and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone returned to the piano, Louisa played billiards with Mr Tankney, and Fanny took a turn round the stables with Denis and Mr David Scott.

Lady Arabella did not appear till lunch-time, and then she came down as freshly coloured as a rose. Her voice was better. We all inquired for her voice : it was a piece of etiquette at Mineham always to inquire for Lady Arabella's voice. Usually her ladyship gave each inquirer a separate detailed account of the very singular kind of bronchial irritation from which she suffered, never failing to add, "Strange to say, this tiresome affection has no bad effect upon my singing-voice. My voice is just as strong as ever, except when I am actually suffering from an acute attack. In fact, I really think my voice is richer than it was thirty years ago."

Lady Arabella's remarkable descriptions of the very peculiar state of her bronchial tubes, were cut short by the arrival of a special messenger from Manyfields for Mr Tankney. Lady Offaway requested Mr Tankney to ride over that afternoon to Manyfields with half-a-dozen of Lady Arabella's concert-tickets in his pocket. Lady Offaway begged Mr Tankney to tell Lady Arabella she feared that she herself would be unable to attend the concert. The Marchioness kindly promised to send the steward, the house-keeper, three of the upper servants, and Sir Harry Hardup, "so as to fill the rooms."

Lady Offaway and Lady Arabella were only just on speaking terms—nothing more. Lady Offaway had said she "positively could not be bored having an ancient aboriginal like that Lady Arabella Scott at Manyfields ; now positively she could not ! It would be quite too more than ludicrous !—like asking an antediluvian animal to dinner !" This saying was repeated all over the county, and came to the ears of the "ancient aboriginal" herself. In consequence thereto, Lady Arabella did not approve of Lady Offaway, and was at a loss to understand why some persons imagined Lady Offaway led the fashion in Dullshire. For

her part, Lady Arabella had no wish whatever to cultivate Lady Offaway's acquaintance.

The message about the steward, the housekeeper, and the upper servants, was not calculated to give Lady Arabella a sudden inspiration of goodwill towards her neighbour. Her ladyship bristled up, and doubted if she had any tickets to spare. She might perhaps have one for Sir Harry Hardup,—perhaps; she was not quite sure.

But Miss Warbattle, looking much puzzled, thought Lady Arabella had made a mistake, and was certain—perfectly certain—there were twenty-eight seats as yet untaken. Miss Warbattle, being seriously set upon disposing of all the vacant places, eagerly pressed Lady Arabella to lose no time in sending the tickets. "We *must* have an audience," said she. Miss Warbattle was eating her luncheon without her spectacles, and with Schumann on the brain. She understood nothing, she saw nothing, she was blind to the visible struggle in Lady Arabella's mind between pride and empty benches. The conflict was an amusing sight to see.

Finally, the longing to dispose of her tickets, and the wish to propitiate Miss Warbattle, overcame Lady Arabella's other feelings. She found, to her surprise, that she really could let Mr Tankney carry off six of her tickets to Manyfields, only she must beg he would give her the six guineas while she remembered the money—she had such a bad memory! always forgot everything! And Lady Offaway could pay Mr Tankney.

As Mr Tankney rode away, Louisa remarked to me what an awful bore it was Lady Arabella had no horse she could ride. Awfully sorry had not brought her own pony! Just a nice canter to Manyfields! And now, she supposed she would be expected to drive in a pony-carriage *tête-à-tête* with that David Scott. Quite too more than a nuisance! Hated old castles, and that sort of thing!

Lady Arabella had proposed an expedition to the ruins of Airum Castle: it was only an eight miles' drive, and Rigardy-Wrenstone was particularly anxious to go there, because he found the castle had belonged to one of Hartmoor's maternal ancestors. Hartmoor had told him he must go and see the old ruin. "Bothered me to go! Not much in my line!"

Miss Warbattle did not intend joining the expedition: there were certain movements and passages she must "try over" in the course of the afternoon while she could get the piano to herself. It was taken for granted that if Miss Warbattle remained at home, she did so in order to fulfil a serious musical duty: she

could not be expected to entertain Lady Arabella. Now it was agreed that somebody must stay with Lady Arabella. Poor dear Lady Arabella ! how could she venture out ? There was a damp in the air which might attack her throat.

On our way up-stairs, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone wondered if she ought to stay at home with Lady Arabella. " Maria Warbattle," said she, " can't be expected to amuse Lady Arabella ; and I know, if I stay, Maria will want me to sing that thing of Schumann's."

" As for me," said Fanny, " I am an awfully bad hand at entertaining the Dows ! awfully bad ! always was ! "

" Nothing to me !" exclaimed Louisa ; " I can't even talk to my own mother : quite a knack ! like talking to poor people ! I should make an awful mess of it, for I am a shocking listener. I positively can't listen ! now positively I can't ! But I say, Georgina," she added—" I say, I should rather stay than have David Scott persecuting me all the livelong afternoon. Positively you must protect me ! now positively you must ! Awful bore ! "

I then proposed to remain with Lady Arabella. The three ladies jumped at my offer, and declared that certainly would be the best arrangement. They were sure no one was better suited to " that sort of thing," and perfectly convinced Lady Arabella would rather have " Sophy" than any of them.

There is one rather peculiar advantage in being a plain woman : people are always quite certain you are suited to the duties of life. They feel sure you were specially created to be bored instead of them.

I dreaded the Chinese wing haunted by Miss Warbattle and her Posthumous Schumann, so I went and waited for Lady Arabella in the old drawing-room. When Lady Arabella found me there, she gave a little scream of surprise, though she must have expected to see me ; she was, oh, so grieved I had not gone with the others ! *Du reste*, as I had remained, we might as well make ourselves comfortable, and stay where we were, and leave the wing entirely to Miss Warbattle.

" There is an echo in that Chinese wing," said Lady Arabella ; " it carries the notes, and keeps them going in your head when they have stopped. Miss Warbattle seems to have been playing all night long and all day long. But I have shut the double doors," she added, " so we can hear our own voices. Draw in your chair to the fire, my dear ; we have just time for a nice little chat. It is barely three o'clock, and they will not be back till six."

Three hours ! an endless time, thought I. But Lady Arabella

seemed so glad to have caught a listener, that I prepared to intermarry and say "Indeed" with a cheerful countenance. I looked round the room for 'Burke' and 'Debrett,' as I expected we should plunge into instantaneous intermarriage; but just at first, Lady Arabella had other little matters on her mind.

"Oh, my dear," she began by exclaiming, "fast girls—fast girls! what an extraordinary invention they are! the most vulgar invention of modern days! Now would you believe it? Miss Louisa took possession of the pony-carriage, and declared David really must drive her; but David, *Dieu merci*, was not to be caught! he insisted on giving the reins to Mr Wrenstone, jumped into your cousin's waggonette, and drove off, leaving the pony-carriage to follow. I really am thankful, thankful beyond measure, to see David so perfectly cured of his infatuation for that girl."

"Infatuation!" I repeated,—"infatuation, Lady Arabella? He was, then, much in love with her? I pity him. Tell me about him. It is hard to be disappointed in everything—hard to be cheated of every hope in life." I knew what it was to live without hope.

"Disappointed!" said Lady Arabella sharply, and she fumbled for her heavy gold spectacles as if she wanted to take a good look at me—"disappointed! Nonsense, Sophy—nonsense! Who could have put such an idea into your head? David never cared for that Miss Clarke—never! She was not the right person for David. No style about her whatever! Besides, when David marries, there really must be a little money lying somewhere between him and his wife. Not that I should ever recommend David to marry for money," she exclaimed, warmly; "indeed David would never marry for anything but love. David is romance itself! Not that he is so very particular about great beauty, but only most romantic, in his own way. The most romantic of men, and the very last one in the world to marry for money—the very last!"

For the next ten minutes the affectionate aunt praised her nephew. David was so clever—he might have taken any degree he liked at college; he never smoked; he never gambled; he was the most affectionate, domestic, and disinterested of men. He would be the best of husbands, but he never cared for that Miss Louisa Clarke—never! never! "And he knows it now! and he sees she broke off the engagement of her own accord. Catherine said he would. Certainly, Catherine Stewart was quite right in advising me to give a concert, and have all the Abbey people here with Mr Tankney to meet David." And

Lady Arabella repeated, "Catherine was quite right! quite right!" and exclaimed, "Catherine has a perfect knowledge of everybody and everything!" Lady Arabella said the constant companionship I enjoyed with a person like Catherine Stewart was an inestimable advantage—"inestimable, my dear, inestimable! a privilege!"

"A privilege," I answered, "only to be rightly appreciated by those on whom it is daily conferred."

"Just so," exclaimed her ladyship; "Catherine is invaluable to us all; she helps one to bring people together, and see things as they are, and as they will be a few years hence. Catherine was determined I should know Mr Tankney, for she knew he would be invaluable at my concerts; and she says truly that I shall have to know him when his father dies, as he will then be one of the chief county people, with £30,000 a-year, and most likely a title; and Catherine hears Lord Tankney has an incurable complaint, and cannot last much longer. Besides, Catherine says we must not visit the sins of the fathers upon the children, but must remember that vengeance belongs to the Lord."

"Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart," I replied, "quotes Scripture with great effect."

"Catherine," said Lady Arabella, "is an excellent creature—excellent, and can manage everything, and bring everybody together; and Mr Tankney is invaluable to me—simply invaluable! for Lord Studhorsey will not sing with Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has offended Mr Reginald Meltem; so we could not get on without Mr Tankney. And Catherine is quite right in saying, no matter how equivocal a gentleman's position in society may be, if he has only a voice and expectations, he can go anywhere. All he wants is to be introduced by the right person. Now you will see, Sophy, when I have introduced Mr Fred Tankney, he will become the rage. I am aware Lady Offaway has already taken him up; but that I consider a positive disadvantage to him. I can let him down or take him up, and society will do the same!"

Lady Arabella's look of satisfaction as she said these words amused me. She told me that she might ask Mr Tankney to meet any one. "Catherine said so. Catherine said the Rigardy-Wrenstones would be enchanted to meet him! And it is so necessary to keep Mrs Wrenstone in good-humour! and so desirable to have more than one singer at a concert! Miss Louisa will only be too delighted to sing with Mr Tankney, and she won't catch cold at the last moment! and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will not cut Miss Louisa's duct out of the programme.

She will keep her temper, and look upon the song as good flirtation instead of bad music. I saw she would even let Miss Fanny sing if I asked Sir Harry Hardup to come and listen to her. My dear, I had the tact to see it!"

Lady Arabella was vain of her social tact. She whispered to me, as a dead secret which I was not to tell Miss Warbattle on any account, that she had sent an invitation to Sir Harry Hardup by Mr Tankney. She said Miss Warbattle need not know Sir Harry was coming until he had come. "The German flute," remarked Lady Arabella, "will take immensely with the audience, and I know Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone will let Sir Harry play *My Lodging is on the Cold Ground*, and even the variations. The Wrenstones would be glad to get Sir Harry's name for Miss Fanny: there were Hardups before the Conquest. It is only Miss Warbattle who will seriously object to the flute, so I must manage to keep her in good-humour if I can. My dear, I have some tact, and I sent those tickets to Lady Offaway solely to please Miss Warbattle. On these occasions I sacrifice every feeling to my amateurs! Now," continued Lady Arabella, sinking her voice as if she were talking treason, "I should like to ask Lord George, but I dare not! Miss Warbattle thinks the Spanish solo dreadful trash, though she is Lord George's own niece. Why, my dear, he is her only uncle living, for he is the last of that generation. The present Duke of Dumbledore is her cousin: he has no son, you know; and as his father married a second time, the heir is a step-brother, and a cousin as well, as the second duchess was the Duke's cousin. . . ." And Lady Arabella stopped to explain by what complication of relationship the late duke managed to be his wife's cousin. Whereupon her ladyship fell hopelessly into intermarriage.

She enlivened the endless subject with little bits of social biography, and improved it, I had almost said sanctified it, with scandal. Her hushed voice, and the manner in which she deplored the state of modern manners, were truly edifying—more edifying, perhaps, than the tales she told.

Lady Arabella gossiped and intermarried until her guests returned from their drive. At appropriate intervals I exclaimed, "Indeed!" and without yawning: my education was perfect in this respect.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Lady Arabella to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Mr Scott—they came first in the pony-carriage—"dear me!" she said, "is it possible you are back again? Sophy has made herself so very agreeable that you seem to have

been gone no time! Really, Sophy, you are agreeable! You have quite the French talent for conversation."

Mr David Scott turned to me, and smiling, thanked me for having so well entertained his aunt; but he was sorry I had been shut up in the house all this fine afternoon. He was very kind and polite.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone exclaimed aloud at finding we were sitting in the drawing-room with the double doors shut. "It is a real treat to hear Maria Warbattle play Schumann!" she said, in an angry voice, as if resenting an injury. Without more ado, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone marched off to the Chinese wing.

Lady Arabella prepared to follow her. The Clarckes had arrived, and I saw her ladyship would have liked to stay and keep an attentive eye upon Louisa; but Lady Arabella only dared wait long enough to repeat what she had said before—"Back again so soon! Is it possible? Sophy has been so very agreeable, that it seems no time since you left!"

For very shame her little ladyship then trotted after the Drill-sergeant.

"You must be a good listener, Miss Thursley," said Mr Scott, laughing. I too laughed to see how experience had taught him the true meaning of his aunt's compliment; but before I could answer, Louisa Clarke was speaking for me.

I had seen Louisa come into the room, looking pale, and pouting. She seemed instantly to perceive Mr David Scott was standing beside me, and to see we were laughing together. She grew paler, and then blushed deeply. Her change of countenance was not lost on my companion; an unmistakable gleam of pleasure crossed his face. I saw he watched Louisa, while trying to appear unconscious of her presence.

Lady Arabella's "Sophy has been so very agreeable since you left," was, strange to say, a compliment which seemed to provoke Louisa, and even to irritate Fanny.

"I am sure Sophy talks awfully well to old Dows of all sorts," said Louisa, pettishly, to Mr Scott; "quite in her line! I knew Lady Arabella would find her awfully agreeable."

"Quite too more than awfully!" exclaimed Fanny; "if you like the kind of thing, you are sure to do it well."

Louisa exclaimed—"All a matter of taste!"

"Of good taste!" cried Mr Scott, in a fiery manner: his violence surprised me.

"I don't set up for having good taste in anything, Mr Scott," retorted Louisa, laying marked emphasis on the *Mr Scott*—for

since their short engagement, they had fallen into the habit of calling each other by their Christian names. "I do not set up for having good taste in anything," she repeated, "except—except in men! I always choose the best sort of man." Louisa said these words as if she were a little ashamed of them; she bent her head and caressed Tiney. It was in suchlike repartee that Lady Offaway was reputed to excel; but Louisa had only stayed four days at Manyfields.

"Louisa and I," cried Fanny, "go in for the jolliest men, jolliest horses, jolliest places, jolliest fortunes, jolliest diamonds, and all that sort of thing!" Fanny had profited much by her visit to Manyfields.

Mr Scott was too well-bred to give Fanny a rude answer; he looked too angry to give a polite one. He merely said, "Cre-e-mation, Miss Clarcke! cre-e-mation!" I do not think Louisa quite liked Fanny's speech, and I rather imagine she would have melted into politeness towards Mr Scott had he not looked at me and laughed when he exclaimed "Cre-e-mation!"

"Ex-actly!" I had replied.

"We do not go in for the old Dows at all! we are not . . . not sufficiently . . ." Louisa paused and looked at me . . . "good-natured," said she, pouting.

"Thanks, awfully!" said I—"awfully!"

Louisa repeated, with a vain little toss of her pretty head—"Don't go in for being good-natured!"

"You tie in too well, Louisa," I answered, remembering the girls' former conversation.

"And I suppose that is a crime, Sophy," said Fanny, testily; "but Louisa and I don't pretend to be stout and unfashionable." Fanny cast an admiring eye upon her own tight skirt.

But now, really, the two girls were quite too more than rude and touchy! now, really they were! I supposed they must have driven home together in the waggonette in quite too more than forsaken desolation, without any admirer to keep them in good-humour. So I inquired, and found that even Rigardy-Wrenstone had left them, saying he would walk on to Manyfields.

Mr Scott opened his eyes at Fanny's speech, and then was seized with a fit of uncontrollable laughter. The two girls took it for granted he laughed at their wit; so, wishing to excite still greater admiration, they both "chaffed" me in what they doubtless considered a quite too more than awfully brilliant manner.

They called me "clever and agreeable." I knew what that meant. They "chaffed" me about my quite too more than

utterly fascinating conversation. They begged me to fascinate them, but in the same breath they declared Sophy had better wait till ex-actly fifty years hence—ex-actly! When they were past seventy, they knew they would find Sophy an awfully agreeable old maid—awfully! and more improving even than her Aunt Jane. They “chaffed” me about Aunt Jane and my lively Uncle Sherbrook, and they ended by asking how on earth I spent my day at Sherbrook Hall.

“In the morning,” said I, “I walk on the back avenue and listen to Aunt Jane; in the afternoon, I walk on the front avenue, and listen to Aunt Jane and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; in the evening, I talk to Uncle Sherbrook of the weather.”

How this answer did amuse them! and no wonder! They vowed such a life would drive them mad in three days. But they did not pity me! On the contrary, I saw they considered me admirably suited to this “awfully slow and quite too more than utterly unendurable sort of existence.” It gave me a pang to feel these lively young ladies were quite sure I had been born on purpose to do dull things and talk to dull people—in a word, to lead the life they themselves most hated, and never would consent to live.

But I was silent. I smiled to their laughter, for I would not betray my secret disappointment to their unsympathetic gaze.

The sound of wheels and trotting horses put a stop to the Clarkes’ quite too more than utterly original chaff: Rigardy-Wrenstone, Mr Tankney, and Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup were in the hall! Fanny ran out to receive the gentlemen, and Louisa followed, saying pointedly as she went—“Mr Scott, Fred Tankney has arrived.”

I was left alone with Mr David Scott. He was at one end of the room, and I stood at the other. He crossed the room, and standing near me, said in his quick, indignant way, “I have no patience with those girls! Flighty, cremating young ladies! They laugh loudly, Miss Thursley, at a sort of life they could not lead themselves—not they! They might have some pity—they who would hate to be buried alive! We all hate it! We hate to be buried when we are alive and young. But the world has hardened Louisa. A horrid fast set has ruined her!” This was said in a most irritated voice; and then, in a gentler one, “She once was soft enough.” These words seemed to escape against his will, for no sooner were they spoken than Mr Scott abruptly changed his tone and manner—“How I should enjoy,” cried he, gaily—“how I should enjoy shutting up Miss Louisa to cremate alone with your uncle and aunt at Sherbrook

Hall ! She would come to her senses quickly in that deadly, well-ordered house and place. I am sure the old people are very kind, and all that sort of thing—sure of it ; but when I have met your aunt, Miss Thursley, I . . . well . . . I did not think she had much variety or liveliness of mind. She talked of everything in general and the niggers in particular, and she praised those confounded niggers just like my Aunt Arabella. Confound those blacks ! ” exclaimed Mr Scott vigorously, and then begged pardon for his vehemence. I was actually pleased to hear him say, “ Confound those blacks ! ” I should have liked to say it myself.

“ Excuse me, Miss Thursley,” he said ; “ no doubt you are horribly shocked ! for perhaps the pious nigger does not bore you as he does me. All the same, Miss Thursley,” he added, kindly, “ there are times when I fear you must find life a dull affair ; and I pity you—indeed I pity you with all my heart ! ”

For a moment I did not answer. My astonishment was too great. I could hardly believe my ears. I could hardly believe any human being would go to the trouble of casting even a passing thought upon me and the life I led, or would have the imagination to conceive, plain as I was, that I yet might have some of the feelings, and impatience, and tastes of youth.

“ I hope I have said nothing rude, Miss Thursley,” said Mr Scott, eagerly. “ Allow me to apologise ! I am sure your aunt is the best of creatures, and may be a delightful companion for every hour in the day, and for every day in the year ; and I am convinced the change from the back avenue to the front must be intensely exciting. I only thought how bored I should feel myself at Sherbrook Hall ! But pray forgive me, Miss Thursley ; pray don’t be offended.”

“ Offended ! I am not offended, Mr Scott, only taken by surprise,” I said, turning towards him. “ How kind you are,” I exclaimed, “ to think that I might feel as you would feel ! Ah, Mr Scott,” I added, bitterly, “ for nearly three long dreary years no one in this world has ever thought of me as of himself, and yet I am of the same nature as other people. Yours is the first word of sympathy,” cried I, passionately, “ which any one has cast upon my wearying, hopeless life ! For my aimless life does weary me, Mr Scott, though no one has ever thought so but you. It wearies me—it wearies me to death ! ”

I was going to thank him yet again, but I checked myself, and blushed at my own emotion. What I had heard the Clarkes say rushed upon my mind, and filled me with fear

and awkwardness, making me think the gushing gratitude of a “dumpy fright” would tease a young man.

Without another word, I ran away. It was late, being just the dinner-hour. The hall was empty. I feared Fanny and Louisa had had time to exchange but little “chaff” and only an odd “Cre-e-mation!” with Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup and Mr Fred Tankney.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Sir Harry took down Lady Arabella to dinner: he had Lady Arabella on one arm and her shawl on the other, and he carried her ladyship’s smelling-bottle, lozenges, and fan.

Although Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup did not take down Miss Fanny, the young lady was in great spirits, and “chaffed” Mr Fred Tankney. She had Mr Tankney almost to herself, for Louisa hardly spoke a word. Louisa had not yet recovered her good temper. By some mistake of our hostess (I supposed it was a mistake), I happened to find myself seated next to Mr Scott. He talked a great deal to me, and I soon felt quite pleasantly at my ease with him. Louisa sat at the opposite side of the table, rather lower down. Whenever I looked up, I saw her face turned towards me. Her eyes were awake, and seemed to hear every word my neighbour said. It crossed my mind that perhaps he talked so much to me in order to tease Louisa. I thought it very natural he should wish to tease her when she had been so unkind to him, and very improbable that any one would care to talk in an agreeable, lively way to me, and to amuse me because he liked me.

And I was amused, delighted, carried out of myself, by Mr Scott’s conversation. Oh the charm of natural, lively, quick-sighted conversation, spoken glibly, lightly, unburdened by ponderosity, or the wish to improve your moral nature!

Witty words spoken by instinct will awaken an inspiration to answer in your own mind which will surprise you. The sudden flash of wit in others, makes one feel a wit one’s self; and nothing on earth is so delightful as to be deceived into the impression you have wit. Wit is a revelation: you see where you were blind; it is a sudden lighting up of all the mind. To me it was like a rising from the dead, to feel my dulled thoughts flash into sudden life.

Mr Scott said many brilliant, witty things to me. I cannot say if I really said anything witty to him—I merely know he had the art to make me feel as if I did.

But I only half remember our delightful conversation, and if I could I would not repeat it in cold blood. I should not dare, for fear I might find the sprightly liveliness was but poor stuff after all; for wit is a dainty dish which should be taken hot,—much of it is cold hash for the morrow.

Since my mother's death I had considered the necessity of listening to the talk of others and of talking myself of the weather as the chief trial of life. I had forgotten there could be a pleasure in conversation. So the discovered delight came upon me as a great surprise. We were nearly two hours at dinner, and it seemed like ten minutes!

I need hardly say that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone and Miss Warbattle hurried from the dining-room to the piano. Lady Arabella, on the contrary, astonished me. She turned over the pages for Miss Warbattle, and exclaimed, at appropriate intervals,—“Sweetly pretty! Quite charming! Wonderful counterpoint! A real *tour de force*! So exquisitely original! Marvellous harmony! Too delicious!” In fact, she entirely devoted herself to keeping her amateur *artistes* in good-humour, and she seemed to have abdicated her own right to play and sing. I supposed Lady Arabella was trying to atone for having shut the double doors on Schumann.

Fanny and Louisa, seated sideways on the back-to-back ottoman, kept up a whispered conversation with each other. Fanny seemed amused, and Louisa annoyed. I could not help thinking they were whispering about me, for they looked at me continually. Young ladies who are quite too more than rapid do not care to have good manners.

Fanny looked at me and laughed. Louisa scanned me from top to toe. I felt her eyes were taking in every defect of my dress and person: when she whispered to Fanny, she did not look at her, but kept a fixed gaze on me. I wondered if she were saying,—“What an awful bore for David Scott! How he does hate plain girls!” and repeating what she had said before, “It is not he who speaks to them, but they to him.” I tried to remember if I had spoken most to him or he to me. I feared I had talked a great deal, and I was ashamed to think how glad I had been to talk with him. I hoped I had not bored him, yet dreaded that I had. I greatly feared I had bored him. I made a vow I would not speak to him again. I made a vow I would keep far off, out of temptation; so, taking

up a newspaper, I crossed the room, and sat right away from the door by the pagoda-like chimneypiece. I thought I would read the newspaper and look at no one.

I read attentively until Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup came in from the dining-room: he excited my curiosity so much more than the 'Morning Post,' that I could not help observing him. The very instant he entered the room, he seemed to perceive Lady Arabella's shawl was lying untidily on the back of a chair. He folded it neatly—I might say respectfully. He noticed Lady Arabella had dropped her handkerchief; he picked it up. He saw her ladyship was without her smelling-bottle; he gave it to her. He discovered she had mislaid her lozenges; he searched for them zealously, and when he had found them, could not rest till Lady Arabella had taken one. He insisted on getting Lady Arabella a comfortable chair. He rang the bell for tea. He slid about quietly, and created no commotion, except when he spoke. He spoke seldom and little: he had a stutter; yet, for some unaccountable reason, the few words he did say made a great sensation. When Sir Harry opened his mouth, Mr Fred Tankney laughed, Fanny and Louisa laughed, and Sir Harry himself laughed. They even laughed before the brilliant inventor of "Cremation!" actually spoke. When "Cre-e-mation!" did come out, it convulsed them all. "Cre-e-mation" was an "awful joke." Sir Harry himself seemed to be an "awful joke"—a joke even when he held his tongue—a standard joke, and the embodiment of all the standard jokes at Manyfields; or, to speak more correctly, the butt of the jokes—the centre of all the horsey, awful-spill sort of "chaff." Evidently Sir Harry liked to be "chaffed," and expected to be chaffed. I supposed he liked the chaff because it made him feel such an "awful joke," and I imagined, had he not felt such an "awful joke" he never could have fancied he was a man of infinite humour. I saw that Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup did think himself a perfect wag—almost as great a wit as Mr Fred Tankney and the Clarckes were pleased to consider him.

I perceived, to my amusement, that Denis seemed quite put out at the way Sir Harry was monopolising the general attention and chaff. He fidgeted uneasily about the room, and at length left the region of Sir Harry's pre-eminence and came over to the fireplace where I sat. He shot down his shirt-cuffs—"shot his linen," as Fanny Clarke calls the trick—standing beside me. Denis was civility itself to me at Mineham. My cousin's manner differs according to the place where he meets you. He

will patronise you openly in a house of the "right sort," especially if the right sort of people do not snub you. I felt that Lady Arabella's friendly kindness towards me had affected Rigardy-Wrenstone's imagination.

"What an awful joke Sir Harry is!" cried I, in the language of Manyfields; "awful fun chaffing him! seems to like it awfully!"

"Queer fellow," exclaimed Rigardy-Wrenstone; "queerest fellow ever met in my life! Likes to be made a fool of! Got a taste for the thing! Been so long the laughing-stock at Manyfields, likes to be laughed at! likes to be chaffed! Lady Offaway awfully down upon him! chaffs him unmercifully! and he takes it as a compliment! Never thinks of chaffing a fellow himself, unless my lady tells him. Sometimes she sets him to chaff the aborigines; awful joke to hear him! Lady Offaway sits upon him afterwards. By George, he would do anything to curry favour with her! Never saw such a man! perfect tame cat!" My cousin lowered his voice. "Born toady," he said, with a look of intense contempt; "must always be toadying some one; takes to it naturally. Toadies the lady of the house. Does tame cat and led captain to Lady Arabella. By George, Sophy, there he is, down on one knee! turned himself into a music-desk for Lady Arabella!"

Rigardy-Wrenstone could not stand this. It was clearly quite too more than too much for him. In next to no time he had supplanted Sir Harry, and was himself holding the music-book for Lady Arabella. Miss Warbattle had strongly advised Lady Arabella to follow the score of the symphony she and Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone were playing.

Our hostess looked as if she liked having Denis for a music-stand much better than she did Sir Harry. From her manner towards Sir Harry Hardup, I knew she did not fancy him. I daresay she despised a man who could be tame cat to Lady Offaway.

Strange to add, Sir Harry did not seem a bit annoyed. Perhaps it was an "awful joke" for Denis to supplant him beside the lady of the house—a joke after the pattern and practice of Manyfields. Undoubtedly, Sir Harry seemed quite accustomed to the sort of thing. He let himself be handed over as a matter of course from one lady to another.

Fanny Clarke accepted him from Lady Arabella, and secured him by means of a new skein of wool. He sat on a stool at her feet; he held up both hands, and she wound the worsted at her leisure. But now really, that dear, delightful Sir Harry

did prove so utterly original, and so quite too more than utterly amusing, that Fanny, to use her own elegant expression, "split!"

Mr Tankney "chaffed" Sir Harry, and it was such awful fun, that Louisa chaffed him too.

Miss Warbattle naturally found all this "chaffing" and laughing an interruption to the serious business of life, so she requested the whole party of chaffers to go into the billiard-room.

Mr David Scott had been standing near Louisa. During dinner she had seemed to long for every word he spoke; but the very instant it was in her power to speak to him, she turned away in the most marked manner, and "chaffed" with Mr Tankney. I could not understand her. When she followed Fanny, Sir Harry, and Mr Fred Tankney into the billiard-room, she looked back at Mr Scott, and appeared to expect he would come too. For an instant she stood still, as if stayed by a sudden impulse to return—then walked on. But he did not follow her. I doubt if he even noticed her momentary hesitation: he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts, and looked as if they were bitter ones. I saw his look; I could not help seeing it—my newspaper had fallen to the ground. I pitied him with a deep, strong pity. Such pity rose unbidden in my heart, because I could so easily conceive his feelings: it was easy for me to understand the pain of disappointed hope and unsatisfied affection.

It is in the very nature of pity to carry us far from self, and make us forget all other feelings in that one.

Mr David Scott took a chair beside me. At first he sat almost in silence, then suddenly broke forth into vehement speech, as if his thoughts must breathe aloud or stifle him. As he spoke, I forgot my appearance, and vows of silence and reserve; I forgot all about myself in the yearning to be kind. He spoke bitterly, very bitterly, of the difference it makes in life to be nobody or somebody. He inveighed against the worldliness of women, who soon let a man know what his prospects really are. "But a man," he said, "would not care for their slights if he had a career before him—an open field where he could gallop away from worry, and ride in the first flight." He told me that once he had had a career, a life, before him, while now he had nothing but dead stagnation. "Dead stagnation and my aunt's niggers! or some hateful office! I am too old," he said, "for the army, and I should hate to be some wretched clerk, toiling without hope; that is an intoler-

able lot for a man when his ambition has been roused, and he has felt a future worth having within his grasp. Present insignificance is nothing if you feel there is a future before you. But you cannot be happy slaving in the dark for nothing, when you have worked in broad daylight with an open career right before your eyes." He repeated, "I had a life before me once."

And then, as if moved by an irresistible impulse, he opened his heart to me, and told me his whole story—the story of his shattered hopes, his ruined career, and even of his disappointed love. He seemed to be carried on, in spite of himself, to talk of his broken engagement and of Louisa. He told me he was glad she had not married him according to her promise—very glad; that he almost hated her now. Passion trembled in his voice as he spoke. I had never heard any one speak like this before. He was stirred by the tale he told, and he spoke with power and eloquence. He has the gift of living, changing speech: his words take the colour of his thoughts, and change as they change; his speech has a life of its own. His very voice moved me.

Truly it was with joy I gave him the sympathy he asked, for there is pleasure in giving away what has lain from year to year unclaimed in your heart. One tires of living like an unlucky pedlar with a pack of useless wares: our unsought goods become a burden, and we give them with an open hand.

It came to pass, that as I listened to David Scott, I forgot to look around me, or to think of other people. I forgot Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's eye-glass, Miss Warbattle, Lady Arabella, my cousin—everybody! I did not even notice when the music ceased.

I was startled into sudden remembrance by Lady Arabella—she touched me on the shoulder, and wondered if I had quite forgotten the time. She said the concert would take place at twelve next day, and that we should all have to be up at some unearthly hour. I looked round: Mr Tankney, Sir Harry, the Clarckes, every one was in the room! They were all standing waiting to say good-night. I saw the eye-glass was upon me. I felt Louisa's eye; indeed I felt every eye in the room. I knew Mr Scott and I were the observed of all observers. There was a perceptible smile on every face, except on Louisa's and Miss Warbattle's.

The awkwardness of that moment confused the plain woman.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I came down very late next morning. I did so on purpose. I was much relieved to find Mr Scott had already breakfasted, and was engaged superintending the arrangement of the Chinese music-room.

The whole county came to Lady Arabella's concert, with the exception of the Marchioness of Offaway and the "person" from Tank Court. It would not have been pleasant for the "person" to face the frowns of the county ladies.

Aunt Jane had intended driving over to Mineham for the day. She was, however, prevented from assisting at the work of charity by "poor dear Catherine's ankle. Poor dear Catherine's ankle is so much swelled that the cold compress has to be renewed every two hours." Aunt Jane wrote to beg I would give this excuse for her absence in answer to all inquiries. She feared people might be offended at her absence; but no one I spoke to seemed a bit angry with Aunt Jane. It was quite different in Lady Offaway's case: from many remarks I heard, I gathered that her absence did give offence. I noticed, it is true, that one or two ladies were not perhaps so much offended with Lady Offaway as with themselves for being where the Marchioness was not: they made excuses to each other as if it were necessary to explain why they came to hear music Lady Offaway did not care to hear. Mrs Pastley said that now really she never would have driven all that long distance, only for poor dear Lady Arabella—"Poor dear Lady Arabella! She does so like you to patronise her African converts! She quite takes it as a compliment, you know. But really, you know, another time one would be tempted to take the tickets and send the servants."

The concert began with a solo from Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. Never in my life, either before or since, have I heard her in such good voice—it almost seemed as if she had a voice. Yet the song was only pretty well received. The audience knew who Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was, so they clapped her; but they did not clap much, because the Abbey people were not as popular as they might be.

Miss Warbattle then played a Schumann. It fell dreadfully flat, although it was not a posthumous. Miss Warbattle had practised indefatigably for days; and this was the miserable result! I pitied her so much that I exclaimed aloud, "So ex-

quisitely classical!" I wanted to say something complimentary, and did not exactly know what. "So exquisitely classical!" was only taken up by a few of the people seated near me. Miss Warbattle deserved better treatment. But the fact is, Miss Warbattle was only one of "that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone's importations." Lord George's fame had not reached Dullshire, so I fancy nobody realised his niece was one of the Dumbledore-Warbattles. Dullshire merely knew she was not related to any of the county people. Now if those same county people do not happen to know who a lady is, they take it for granted she is no one, and judge accordingly the musical genius of that sal-low sort of person who goes about with that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone.

In Dullshire the Clarckes were also "those two girls, some kind of cousins, who go about with that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone." Louisa sang with Tiney under one arm. Two county ladies near me exclaimed—"Nasty little black dog! How ridiculous!" I could not help thinking they might have said, "*What a duck of a little black angel! How utterly original!*" had they but only known Lady Offaway never sang without having a dog under each arm. I am aware it was not then generally known in the county that the Clarckes had stayed four days at Manyfields. I am sure this fact would have elicited a "sweetly pretty" or a "quite charmingly performed" from Mrs Pastley and half-a-dozen others. The duet Fanny and Louisa sang was just the sort of trashy thing naturally suited to the audience; and it was an Italian one—not even an English song: English might have sounded beneath the dignity of the occasion. Still no applause worth mentioning greeted the poor Clarckes' song.

Sir Harry and his German flute came next. The variations were ludicrous. They were abominably played, except some repeating-notes which seemed to let themselves be blown with comparatively little effort from Sir Harry's lip: Sir Harry stuttered, as it were, instinctively through the flute.

Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup—Lady Offaway's tame cat! Nobody thought anything of Sir Harry; but then everybody knew Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup! Ruined himself, poor fellow! such a fine property! ran through everything in no time! Dullshire knew all about him. He was by no means unpopular; and his mother was a Pastley, and the Pastleys were proud of the Hardup-Hardup connection, and the Hardups always acknowledged the Pastleys. Sir Harry never cut his relations or gave himself airs like Rigardy-Wrenstone. So *My Lodging is on*

the Cold Ground and all the variations were enthusiastically encored.

Miss Warbattle winced during the painful operation. Her own most difficult Brahms, with the voice accompaniment sung by Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, was next on the list. It gained so little applause that the poor Drill-sergeant lost her temper, and did not sing again. I felt for her: she had thrown heart and soul into the performance. I clapped till people stared at me, and tried, "So exquisitely classical!" but with even less success than before. The composure and dignity of Miss Warbattle under these trying circumstances filled me with admiration, and I conceived a respect for her, because I saw she was content to sacrifice personal applause to what she considered her great mission in life. When she played her Brahms to an unappreciative country audience, you could see she felt she had done her duty: she had educated the ignorant. Teachers worthy of the name educate the ignorant against their will. I think Miss Warbattle liked educating the unclassical world against its will. There is a ludicrous side to such a mission in life! And yet there must be something almost grand and noble about an amateur musician who can prefer anything on earth to personal applause.

Louisa and Mr Tankney sang a duet. For a moment, I thought no one would clap them. It seemed as if each person hesitated to applaud first. But then, on second thoughts, the audience clapped, and sufficiently to prevent the song from being a fiasco. Mr Tankney has a beautiful voice: I doubt if such a tenor had ever been heard in Dullshire. I could not understand the visible hesitation, till I remembered that Mr Fred Tankney's social position in the county was as yet undefined. I felt convinced, the generally believed report that Mr Tankney would some day be his father's heir was the second thought which, on reflection, made county ladies applaud. What afterwards occurred strengthened this conviction.

I think the next song came as a surprise both to Miss Warbattle and to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. It was not in the programme. It proved to be a *deus ex machina* who put everything to rights, and of a sudden turned the concert into a decided success. Lady Arabella and Mr Fred Tankney most unexpectedly sang a duet for Sambo.

Poor dear Lady Arabella! she was a little hoarse, but not so very hoarse after all. The audience had often heard her sing with a worse cold in her throat; besides, it does not much matter in Dullshire if you are in good voice or bad—the import-

ant point is, who you are, and not how you sing, or even what you sing. The duet was the same *amor-cuor-traditor* affair Lady Arabella and Mr Tankney had practised the other night. The song was rapturously encored, and sung again by Lady Arabella with as much rapture as it was received.

Such a pity for Mr Tankney this *amor-cuor* was not performed earlier in the day! I am sure his duet with Louisa Clarcke would then have been a great success instead of half a failure.

As Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone did not care to sing again, and Fanny and Louisa had sung the only songs they could sing, and Sir Harry had exhausted the *repertoire* of his flute, Mr Fred Tankney sang a solo. Miss Warbattle insisted on its being a very serious Schumann—not one of the beautiful lighter songs, but a posthumous. I may be mistaken, and Schumann may never have sung in his grave, but the monotone sounded like a posthumous of the heavier sort. Yet the audience went wild with delight! The vigorous clapping recalled to my mind Lady Arabella's words: “I can take Mr Tankney up or let him down, and society will do the same.”

When people were leaving the Chinese music-room, I heard them declare the concert went off beautifully. “Such a success!” “Really, Sir Harry plays the flute deliciously!” “Now positively,” said one lady, “Lady Arabella was in wonderful voice! and that Mr Fred Tankney does sing exquisitely, you know!” “Quite a treat!” said another; “charming talent for music! And I really do suppose Lord Tankney intends to make him his heir; Lady Arabella must be certain of it, or she would never have him staying in the house.” “Sir John Moultrie,” remarked a third, “says there is £30,000 a-year in a ring-fence; and he ought to be right.” “Yes, to be sure! His poor dear sister, you know!” “Well, well! let bygones be bygones!” “Geraldine, my dear,” said a lady standing just beside me, to her daughter—“Geraldine, I wish you would not stoop;” then added, in an audible whisper, “If Mr Tankney should offer to take you in to luncheon, you need not refuse.” “But, mamma,” answered the girl, “I thought papa said—” “My dear, my dear, just hold up your head!”

The luncheon was for the benefit of the blacks. You took tickets as if you were at a charity bazaar. Lady Arabella is never mean except in the cause of charity. I heard one lady who was buying a ticket say, “Lady Arabella can do it,—she is so original, you know!—but I don't think everybody could. And Lady Arabella is quite put out if you run away before

luncheon or bring your own sandwiches!—quite put out, you know!"

Mr Scott was so busy doing the honours for his aunt and Sambo, that I slipped away without bidding him good-bye. I left early. Uncle Sherbrook sent me a very particular message by Robert, begging that I would not keep the horses waiting.

The instant I got home I exclaimed, "Cremation, Aunt Jane! let me tie you in! for now positively you are quite too more than utterly ludicrous! Cre-e-mation! you are!"

"Cremation!" cried my aunt, almost gasping for breath; "you sound as if you were swearing, Sophy. From whom did you learn that dreadful expression?"

"Why, from Sir Harry Hardup, to be sure, and his admirers!—that dear, delightful Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup!"

"Sir Harry Hardup!" groaned my aunt. "Was he at Mineham?"

"Certainly! and so was Mr Fred Tankney. All the pious people were there,—and so interested in the welfare of the blacks! They could talk of nothing else."

"Well," replied my aunt, "I am glad to hear that; and I hope they reflected very, very seriously upon the object of the concert. But I am not surprised to hear they talked so much of the African converts (Sophy, I wish you would not call them blacks). I am not at all surprised—although Mr Tankney must be a queer man, and I know Sir Harry Hardup-Hardup is very queer—because I will say that, wherever Lady Arabella is, she always does try to promote edifying and useful conversation. When she comes here and I go to Mineham, I feel spiritually refreshed, Sophy,—and even for days afterwards."

I saw Aunt Jane was sincerely convinced she and Lady Arabella intermarried none but the blacks. The hallucination did not astonish me, for I knew my aunt had the power of being sincerely under wrong impressions. I did not argue the matter with Aunt Jane,—I only exclaimed aloud, "Cre-e-mation!"

"Oh, Catherine! Catherine!" cried Aunt Jane, "is it not dreadful? Sophy says *cremation!* and Mr Fred Tankney always says *cremation!* and it sounds like swearing!"

I remarked, "Not Mr Fred Tankney, but Sir Harry Hardup."

"Now, Sophy, you know you said Mr Fred Tankney was at Mineham."

"So he was, Aunt Jane, but——"

"Then why do you interrupt me, Sophy? You are always interrupting and contradicting, and Catherine has never con-

tradicted me the whole time you have been away! Yes, Catherine, Mr Tankney was at Mineham, and Sophy met him; and was not that dreadful? because he is received nowhere. Oh, Catherine, are not you amazed to hear Lady Arabella asked him?"

I looked at the admirable Catherine. She lay on a sofa tatting the steeple. She was going to speak, but stopped abruptly, and counted her stitches instead.

"Aunt Jane," said I, "Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart cannot feel surprised to hear Lady Arabella Scott followed her advice. It was she advised Lady Arabella to invite Mr Tankney: Lady Arabella told me so. Mrs Stewart brought them together, and said it did not matter how equivocal Mr Tankney's position might be, people would be delighted to meet him, as Lord Tankney had an incurable disease, and Mr Tankney had a voice and 'expectations.' 'Expectations,' it appears, mean £30,000 a-year and a dying father!"

Mrs Stewart did not contradict me: she never belies the truth, unless the denial is sure to be successful. "My dear Mrs Sherbrook," she exclaimed, "it is not for us to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children."

"Just what you said to Lady Arabella," cried I; "and, Mrs Stewart, you also remarked, 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

"And Catherine was quite right to say that, Sophy," said Aunt Jane, "because that text is in Holy Scripture; and Scripture is given us not only for reproof but also for quotation, and Mr Thunderbore said so last Sunday; but I don't think you ever really attend to the sermon, Sophy."

The best of women now had a fair start. She quite justified and sanctified the worldly advice she had given Lady Arabella. I was much edified by all Mrs Stewart said; and I perceived, for the first time in my life, what I have often noticed since, that worldliness is a beautiful thing if wrapped in Christian charity.

CHAPTER XXX.

On my return from Mineham, I thought Uncle Sherbrook looking ill. He was decidedly yellower than usual, and he seemed to be in low spirits. I tried to enliven him by taking

a cheerful view of the weather. "Well, Uncle Sherbrook," I said, "we have had a mild February and a mild March, and a westerly wind in April."

But my uncle only sighed and shivered: "What arrears of east wind we shall have to pay in May and June!" groaned he. I was seriously concerned for the dear old Christian gentleman's liver.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart drove out every afternoon with Aunt Jane. She kept up her foot on the back seat, and she took so many cushions and shawls that I rejoice to say there was no room left in the family coach for "Sophy."

The mule and Dan still lived on at Sherbrook Hall, so as to be ready when wanted; but Aunt Jane declared Catherine should never drive that dreadful, wicked mule again.

The day after my return, Uncle Sherbrook and I walked on the front avenue. Aunt Jane told us to walk there, for Mrs Stewart had hoped, if Sophy were left alone with her uncle, that she would not make him wet his feet.

But the next day, seeing my uncle looked ill and depressed, I said to him, "Uncle Sherbrook, shall we walk on the path over the hill? You and I took a turn there once, and you told me all about that right-of-way. Was it ten years, or only nine, your famous lawsuit lasted?"

"Ten," replied my uncle, brightening—"ten, Sophy. I see you have a bad memory, and I therefore presume you have forgotten all but the leading features of that lawsuit; and," he added, with animation, "a few clear details are necessary, if you wish properly to appreciate the clever manner in which Jones handled the case; so we will just talk the matter over as we go along. I should like you to have a clear idea of the difficulties we had to contend with; for although the point at issue was a simple question of right-of-way, the interests involved were both numerous and complicated." And so they were!

We went by the beech-tree, past the garden-gate, and down through the laurels. Leaving Aunt Jane's crockery-rockery summer-house to our left, we continued in the hollow until we came to the path which led over the hill. The complications of the interests involved in the famous lawsuit lasted the whole time: they lasted from the bottom to the top of the hill, to the second gate which barred the right-of-way. As well as I could make out, these gates were erected by Act of Parliament. Uncle Sherbrook unlocked them by special Act of Parliament, —at least so I thought from the look of him.

Just inside the second gate, dreadful to relate! we met a little puppy-dog trespassing on the right-of-way. I believed this to be a capital offence. Uncle Sherbrook said it was punishable by the law of the land, and his serious face cast sentence of death upon the offending cur. He frightened the puppy by staring at it, so the creature put its tail between its legs and ran to me. My uncle said he would take the dog to the front lodge and leave it there until he had consulted Mr Boggle. "I think Boggle was to be in Harefield this afternoon, Sophy; though Jones," muttered he, "knows more of this case." Then, as if his conscience were ashamed, he exclaimed, "But I will consult Boggle."

Uncle Sherbrook gave me the keys of the two gates, and told me not to wait more than an hour for him. "If I am not here an hour hence, Sophy, you will know I have found Boggle, and am detained by business. If detained, I shall return the shorter way by the front avenue."

My uncle whistled to the puppy; but it stuck to me, played with the skirt of my dress, and would not follow him, so he was forced to bend down and pick up the squealing doggy: he carried it by the nape of the neck solemnly, as if to execution. Uncle Sherbrook walked on, and I turned to hide a rising smile. I was not uneasy as to the puppy's fate: I knew my uncle would be quite satisfied the dog should live when he had clearly established his right to kill it.

I was glad Uncle Sherbrook had caught a trespasser, however small, as I knew this little excitement would raise his circulation and his spirits; and then I was glad for my own sake too: I felt very glad to be left alone.

The air was bright with sunshine, and quite warm for the time of year, and I had longed to enjoy in silence the beauty of this April day.

I had asked my uncle to stop a moment at the top of the meadow, on the brow of the hill, just before we came to the second gate. The country for miles lay stretched under our feet. But my uncle wished I would not interrupt him; he said he did not care to look at an ill-drained plain, and remarked that Jack Jones farmed his land badly. Uncle Sherbrook saw nothing but Jack Jones's fields in the view before us, and he thought them an ugly sight. To my mind the far-reaching view was not ugly: all lands have a beauty of their own in spring; besides, I liked the open freedom of the plain below. I did not feel shut in. I breathed, and I forgot that life is a narrow valley. The imagination loves to roam an open coun-

try like the one I looked upon, stretching to far-distant hills: a haze hung over those distant hills, so that you could not mark their outline upon the sky. There was no rent in the soft cloud—no separating death between the spirit of this earth and heaven. The blue hills melted into the sky like the last earth-born thought of a man rising with his soul above—a thought begun on earth to end in heaven: rising with a sigh in man's last sleep, thought I; for a soft air came from those distant hills, and seemed like a sigh of joy coming over the budding fields—joy that winter was passing into spring! The sighing air was not a wind stirring the peaceful earth, but rather a living calm, like a joy which moves yet lulls the heart; it was a gentle breath to the primrose and violet, to the daisy and opening buttercup. The birds did not disturb this soothing calm: their song has no distracting passion in it for our mind. On a fine day in early spring, that sweet song of birds is in the air we breathe, and we breathe it without knowing that we breathe. We feel the birds are singing; we do not listen to hear. The music blends with our lulled thoughts in very tuneful harmony; and so does the music of that other sound we feel—the sound which passes over waving grass and boughs of trees,—a sound wafting to our ear, from time to time, the lowing of a cow, the bark of the cottager's dog, the bleating of a lamb, or the far-off voices of men—voices from another world! for we think they are not of this one: hallowed by the distance, there is so strange a note in them, that we remember the voices we never thought to hear again. We remember our dead, but not with sorrow in an hour like this. The Spirit of God is upon the earth in the hour of its awaking beauty; and it seems near to heaven, and we to the near presence of some holy joy.

I leant upon the gate. I shut my eyes so as better to feel that near presence and the rapture of those distant sounds. The far-off voices gave me pleasant dreams, and when the voices ceased, I still dreamt on: there were dreams in the very air, in the violet-scented bank close by, in the buzz of insects—and dreams in that warble of the birds. Suddenly I was startled by the sound of a脚步声. I opened my eyes, and I saw a man walking up by the path through the meadow towards the gate on which I leant. He came from the far-stretching country of my pleasant dreams, like the spirit of one of the distant voices I had heard.

Awaking still more, I saw it was Mr David Scott who walked towards me, so I opened the gate and went down to meet him. I was glad to see him: it seemed so natural to feel glad amidst

the sights and sounds of this sweet April day. I met him filled with the calm joy around me; gravely glad, without tremor or self-conscious shyness. He too was glad to see me; but he did not seem surprised to meet me, for he said he had seen me from the road below.

We walked on together; and when we gained the brow of the hill, he turned to look at the view which lay behind us. Seeing he was not insensible to the beauty of the hour, I told him just to listen for one moment to all the sounds and songs that filled the air.

We both stood still; and as we listened, we heard the cuckoo in a distant wood—so distant, indeed, that it was more like the echo of last year's note than the fresh, strong one of this year's spring. We heard it three times, and then it was gone! I heard the cuckoo's first note with great delight; there is a startling beauty in the sound.

All men who are fond of field-sports like to hear the first note of a winter-hidden bird. Mr Scott listened again, but the voice was silent and would not awake. He spoke of the cuckoo's strange disappearance during so many months of the year. He seemed well acquainted with the habits of most birds, and particularly, I thought, of snipe, teal, wild-duck, and grouse: he also, I must allow, appeared to delight in shooting them. He talked with almost passionate regret of the Clinchfisted grouse-moors, where he used to have such excellent sport. I perceived he was a man who took a passionate delight in all that pleased him. I liked this warmth; but I understood it better when he passed from bemoaning grouse-moors to grieving over the serious losses of his life. He apologised to me for speaking again and always on the same subject; but he said the boredom of his present purposeless existence made him regret his lost career, till the regret became an intolerable irritation which he hated keeping to himself, and longed to vent on some one.

"I can't let off steam to my aunt," said he, "for I see she thinks I ought to be content with my glorious career at Mineham; but a man cannot live a woman's petty life! Vexation worries him twice as much as it does her."

"Does it?" said I.

"Not a doubt of it," he answered, as if the matter were a certainty: "women are born to be worried; and indeed they take to it so naturally, that hardly one of them can understand a man's impatient, insupportable annoyance when he is thwarted. It is no good talking to them: they have not an idea what you really mean." He paused; then added, in that thrilling voice

of his which impresses all he says upon your memory, and which rings in your ear afterwards, making you remember what he has said, even if it be a little, unimportant nothing, better soon forgotten—"But you, Miss Thursley," he added, "I know that you understand my intolerable irritation, my despair. I can speak to you as if I were speaking aloud to myself. I feel at my ease in speaking to you. I came up here on purpose to talk to you, when I saw from down below that Mr Sherbrook had left you, and you were alone. I should like to meet you, Miss Thursley, and speak to you, every day of my life, until I bored you and you would listen to me no longer."

"You would never bore me," said I, gravely; "I would listen to you a long time." There was something in the tone of my own voice, as I said these words, which startled me: it was as if it had caught the thrill of his voice. "No, no!" I exclaimed, laughing, "you would not bore me, because you are neither pompous nor pedantic. You say what you think, and not what you fancy you ought to think. All you say is true, and I feel for you as for a real man. You are no irreproachable prig, Mr Scott; you have lost heart for the battle of life, and you say so. If you cannot fight as a leader, you do not care to fight as a common man; you have not the courage to become no one. You do not pretend to a bravery you have not got!"

Mr Scott seemed to think there were two sides to this laughing compliment. He took fire at what I said. "Bravery" brought the colour to his face and a flow of words to his lips. He tried to prove to me, and I think also to himself, that it would be cowardice in him to accept any sort of obscure, uncongenial toil, when he would hate it so intensely that he could but fulfil the duty badly, whatever it might be, and keep out some better man. He seemed to think it far more courageous to bear the irritation of enforced idleness: "For then you do not give up the game. You are ready if a lucky chance befriends you. You are not lost in the backwoods. You have not gone out to the colonies, or shelved yourself at home. If the old career comes within your grasp, you are there to take hold of it, and you are the same man as before: you are not roughened into a barbarian, or changed into an idiot and a copying-clerk."

"But should the chance never come, where are you?"

"It must come!" he retorted, with energetic conviction—"it must come some day! Every fellow gets a chance in life."

"Dear me!" I exclaimed, "you surely do not expect the Clinchfisted babies will get the croup and die? Such babies are always remarkably healthy, and not a bit good-natured."

They never think of dying to make room for the man they have ruined."

No ; Mr Scott did not expect this. Indeed I could see the Clinchfisted infants had never entered his head. It was not easy to make out what lucky chance he expected, or what he was thinking of. Perhaps he did not know himself. Or perhaps, thought I, he does not like to tell me. Lady Arabella may have invented an heiress for him, and he may have her now in his mind's eye. I could not think of any Dullshire heiress. I hoped, wherever the lady came from, she would be worthy of him. I hoped she would understand him ; for I did not think every woman would understand him, and I feared he might be very unhappy with an unsympathetic wife. Naturally enough, I did not like to ask about the heiress ; and as he never alluded to any idea of the sort, I was uncertain, after all, whether he did not rely on some unforeseen accident of which he had no clear conception—a vague lucky chance which every fellow gets in life ! I saw he was so anxious the chance should come, that he believed it must come. He waxed eloquent on the subject ; it excited him, and he is always eloquent when moved.

As I listened to him, I grew to believe what he believed. To that ear of mine which had been bored these long years, he was so eloquent that I came to think those who had heard him at Westminster must long to hear him again. I felt convinced the Carlton Club would wish to return such a clever speaker at the next election. Like Aunt Jane, I had a notion the Carlton returned remarkable young statesmen at its own expense, without costing the young statesman a penny ; so I considered the heiress quite unnecessary, and was glad to put her out of the question.

Mr David Scott dwelt enthusiastically upon the delightful excitement of a political career. I saw he could not forget the sensation his maiden speech had made. Applause had roused his ambition—the ambition to make a name in England. Such ambition seemed noble to me, accustomed as I was to no ambition at all, or to none higher than a parochial ambition,—the ambition to worry your neighbour, to patronise your parson, to copy the ways and manners of a titled vulgarian because she is a titled county magnate, and keeps a big establishment, and has her house full of gay people bent on amusement ; or the ambition to immortalise your name and arms upon the village inn !

I much encouraged Mr Scott to speak of that time when his ambition and his hopes were roused. I liked to hear him speak of it. I did not consider what he said vain or foolish. I was

in no censorious mood. It gave me pleasure to be persuaded of his talent. I longed to think him some uncommon man—a man to make his mark in life, and not one doomed, like those around me, to silent insignificance.

I felt as if he could never talk enough of that large career he once had almost made his own. I loved to listen to him, and I loved to watch him as he spoke: his eye, his face, his hand, were full of life. He is not what people call a handsome man. His colouring and his features leave no particular impression on your mind unless you know him very well. It is the expression of the face which you remember—the life of the eye.

His figure is well proportioned and rather tall. As he talked, he leant backwards with his left elbow resting on the highest bar of the gate, and one foot on the lowest. He kept his right hand free.

This is one of the pictures in my life. I see it now as it was then. The softly tinted sky, marking the outline of his figure, has not faded. His eloquent lips are parted; his eager eye still speaks; his hand yet lives. Time has passed over the picture and left it undimmed. The violet-scented bank on which I sat is there unchanged before my eyes; I turn, and still listen, and I hear his voice—that voice which I can never hear without a thrill of joy or pain!

When that voice is in my ear I forget the passing hours.

I knew not for how long I had sat listening on the violet bank, when the cawing of the crows, resting in their homeward flight upon the tops of the neighbouring trees, roused me to a sense of time, and made me think the evening hours were drawing near. Mr Scott looked at his watch, and said it was more than two hours since he had left the road below. For a moment I was overcome with confusion to think how long a time the plain woman had kept him talking to her alone; but I remembered I had really been waiting for Uncle Sherbrook. This was a great relief to my mind. I had quite forgotten my uncle!

“I think Uncle Sherbrook must have gone home by the front avenue, Mr Scott,” said I, rising; “it is of no use our waiting for him any longer. I have the keys, so I can let you out of the lower gate. Perhaps,” I exclaimed, “it is as well my uncle has not caught you here. He would be shocked to find you had jumped that gate without an Act of Parliament.”

Mr Scott declared I had better not tell him; he said I should only upset his nerves. “And as I am off to London to-morrow, I cannot possibly upset them again for another two months at

least ; and then, instead of trespassing, I intend asking Mr Sherbrook for a key. I hear he likes being asked for a key."

" But what on earth do you want a key for ? " I asked.

Mr Scott said the path was a short cut to Harefield.

" Harefield ! " I exclaimed ; " and what is the good of going to Harefield ? There is nothing to be done when you get there but to go back again ; and there is nothing to be bought in Harefield but an attorney or a red flannel dressing-gown with black spots on it."

Mr Scott said a retired cavalry sergeant, who was a first-rate fencer, had settled in the village—" and I seriously think of fencing with the fellow when I return to Mineham—just to keep my hand in ! " He said, by taking the train from Karton to Klipton, and from Klipton to Norris, you were landed just a mile from here ; " and it is nothing of a walk at each end."

I suggested that his shorter way must surely be to go straight from Karton to Harefield.

" I should not get enough exercise that way," he replied. " I must have my exercise—I am never the thing without it ! It is a nice little bit of ground from Norris to Harefield if you come through here. Such a fine view up there ! " he exclaimed, turning and pointing up to the gate on the brow of the hill, where we had sat and talked so long. " It is the finest view at this side of the county."

I was glad to find he had a taste for scenery. I told him so. " You often walk up there ? " he said, stopping, and looking me full in the face. I blushed under his eager, lively gaze, because I can never help blushing if I am looked at suddenly. " You often walk there ? " he repeated ; " now don't you ? "

" No," said I. " I walk either on the front avenue or on the back. Aunt Jane does not like me to walk anywhere else. She only likes me to go where she goes, and she even dislikes Uncle Sherbrook to walk where she does not ; and so does Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. When they hear where my uncle went to-day, I know they will both declare he has wet his feet."

I sighed as I said this. Mr Scott looked at me again and smiled.

We had now come to the last gate. I unlocked it, and said good-bye ; for from hence our paths diverged. But Mr Scott seemed to think I had dismissed him hurriedly. He leant on the open gate, and asked if I had forgotten how long a time it would be till we should meet again. I apologised for my hurry by the lateness of the hour, and turned to go. Seeing he still lingered, I came back. He said perhaps we should meet again

sooner than we thought. He declared he should be dead-sick of London at the end of a month, and vowed that whether Lady Arabella stayed or left, he certainly would come to Mineham for a day or two at Whitsuntide.

“What pleasure can I find in London now?” said he. “I shall not have an earthly thing to do. I shall be bored to death! How can a man go into society when he has hardly money enough to buy gloves? Besides,” he exclaimed, “I don’t care for society, and I would not go into it if I could. People would cut me, now that my prospects are changed; and even if the men wanted to ask me to dinner, the ladies would not let them. By Jove, if a strong-minded father did manage to invite me, the mother would watch me as if I were a convict! Wherever I went, I should feel I was under strict police surveillance. I should have to watch every word I uttered. I should never feel at ease with any girl,—and I like to feel at ease with those I speak to.”

He paused, and I thought he would now take leave, but he lingered on.

“Miss Thursley,” he said, “how pleasantly at ease we are together. With how little effort you and I can talk!” He smiled. “We talk for hours, and then wish to stay and talk still more.”

He paused again. I thought he waited for an answer, yet something prevented me from speaking of the pleasure I had felt in meeting him. He looked at me, said an abrupt good-bye, and walked away. But he only went a few paces, and then returned to the gate on which I now was leaning, watching him and wondering at him.

“Pray excuse me, Miss Thursley,” said he, as if much piqued—“pray excuse me for having tired you out.”

“Tired me!” said I, puzzled and quite angry at the mere idea. “Do I look much bored?” And I added bitterly, “I have not a face which can express my thoughts: its heaviness belies the truth, and misleads those who look at me. Don’t look at me!—never look at me!” And I exclaimed warmly, “You have not tired me, Mr Scott. I like to hear you speak, and I like to speak to you; for if you are at your ease with me, I am also strangely at my ease with you. I can talk to you as I think. I feel I am myself to-day.”

Mr Scott laughed heartily, and asked who I felt I was when not myself?

“When I am buried low down in the family circle at Sherbrook,” said I, “my identity gets smothered, and mixes

up with other peoples'. Very often I feel I am only a bit of Aunt Jane!" And so saying, I ran away, and never looked back till I got into the midst of the laurel grove. I was afraid to look back, for fear I should see Mr Scott still lingering at the gate and waiting for me to return. I ran most of the way home. The frightening-bell was ringing as I arrived. I tossed on my gown anyhow, and by a superhuman effort managed to be just in time for dinner.

CHAPTER XXXL

In due time Mrs Stewart cross-examined me, and found that Sophy had actually taken poor dear Mr Sherbrook for a walk on that horrid damp path over the hill.

"Oh, Catherine!" said Aunt Jane, "then Edward must have wet his feet: he may get his death, and it will be all Sophy's fault!"

Sophy was not to be trusted with her uncle. This dogma—it became one—was joyfully accepted by Aunt Jane, but it originated with Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. The good woman was seriously displeased with me—far more so than Aunt Jane. When twenty-four hours had elapsed since "Edward" wet his feet, and my aunt found he could eat his breakfast, lunch, and dinner with appetite, she began to forget that Sophy had led her uncle's constitution into temptation. The continual bandaging of Catherine's ankle made Aunt Jane's memory less tenacious than usual of Sophy's sins. But the admirable Catherine was in no forgetful mood. I saw she could not bear the idea of Sophy's being alone with her uncle, and of Sophy's getting round her uncle, and taking him where she liked, and talking nonsense to him. She wanted to know what he had talked about during our long walk. I fancy she suspected we had been making a will. She did not like to ask the question point-blank, but I saw it lay on the tip of her tongue. I enjoyed teasing her; so I was mysterious, and refused to repeat private conversations. This was silly imprudence on my part.

That very afternoon Mrs Stewart had a pain in her foot. She said too much carriage exercise shook the ankle. She declared it was quite enough for the injured bone to be shaken three times a-week, and announced her intention of sitting just

outside the Corinthian porch for an hour or two every other afternoon.

"Then, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, poor dear Mr Sherbrook will have some one to walk with. It is rather hard on him to be abandoned by us every afternoon, and left with no one but Sophy ; besides, Sophy is not to be trusted with her uncle."

"Indeed, Catherine," cried Aunt Jane—"indeed she is not ! I will take care of Edward. I will see that Edward does not wet his feet. The front avenue is never wet, Catherine ; it is always dry—for the rain runs off it, and does not soak into it, and Snipkins says it is something in the soil ; so you never get your feet wet if you do not walk on the grass—and Edward never walks on the grass. It is only Sophy who walks on the grass, and even on the flower-beds, though she says it is I who walk on the beds and on the mound in the garden ; and you know, Catherine, I never did such a thing in my life—never ! I would not do such a thing ! I should think it wrong—quite wrong, Catherine !"

The other three days of the week, Mrs Stewart insisted on my driving in the close carriage with her and Aunt Jane. She discovered her ankle did not really want more than two cushions to prop it up on the back seat.

"My dear Mrs Sherbrook, you are spoiling me ! I shall never be able to bear the heartless solitude of Riverbank again ! But, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, now really two cushions are quite enough ! Sophy must wear her tight jacket, and sit well in the corner, and hold her hands still, and keep her knees bent and her feet quiet, and then there will be plenty of room for all of us."

I obeyed the chief orderer, squeezed myself very small, and drove in that hateful close carriage with wonderfully good grace,—at least it was wonderful, considering how much I disliked snailing along backwards with my aunt, the tatting, and the two ladies' tongues.

I went thus driving with Mrs Stewart, and did not walk with my uncle, because I feared to excite overmuch the admirable Catherine's jealousy. I thought it wiser to soothe this growing irritation before it became a passion, mastering the woman's whole mind. I did not want Mrs Stewart to get me on her nerves, as I well knew what it was for her to get a person on her nerves !

Mrs Stewart was amazed to see me come driving with so good a grace : she knew I hated that crawling carriage. No wonder she was surprised at my amiability ; it was unnatural

in me! for there I sat pinched into nothing, tatted at unceasingly, and seemingly silent for two hours at a stretch, and yet in very good-humour all the time! Mrs Stewart's piercing gaze could make nothing of me. At last I really think my amiability alarmed her; I think she feared there was a trick in it.

“Why, there is Sophy!” cried Aunt Jane, more than once—“oh, Catherine, there is Sophy smiling to herself, and her lips are moving!” These last words would catch my ear and give me an unwelcome start in the midst of some pleasant conversation; for I was only seemingly silent: I was really talking all the time, and I hated to be interrupted and looked at and noticed. I liked to talk on quietly in security and peace, for now I always had a pleasant companion by my side. This was the secret of my unnatural amiability. No matter where I went or who went with me, the companion came too, and stayed with me, and never left me.

Life had changed for me since that bright spring day when I had met David Scott on the path over the hill. He had refreshed my wearied mind, so I liked to think he was always talking to me and I to him. It was no effort to imagine him beside me, for his voice was ever in my ear. I could hear his voice, and hear him say, “I should like to meet you and speak to you every day of my life, until I bored you and you would listen to me no longer.” And then again, “How pleasantly at ease we are together! We talk for hours, and then wish to stay and talk still more.” Ah yes! how pleasantly at ease we are together! that is the secret of all agreeable conversation. No stifling of nature, no striving strain, no fear in that perfect ease! We give to the kindred sympathetic mind, the half-formed thought just opening in our own, and we give in confidence of perfect understanding.

For some years I had felt as if I were living hopelessly smothered up in wet blankets. I am sure the turn of Aunt Jane’s mind and the ramble of her sentences would be a wet blanket to any sort of imagination. It was an effort to converse with her,—an effort to converse with every one I knew, except one man—only and except one man! I told myself this was the sole reason I chose that man’s quick-sighted, lively mind as my companion when I wished to enliven my solitude with pleasant discourse.

Each morning I now walked with David Scott on the back avenue in imaginary conversation. The morning’s walk ceased to depress my spirits, since I no longer walked alone with Aunt

Jane. I had my aunt at only one side of me ; I had my imagination at the other, and I let it lead me where it would.

I had spent nearly three weeks living thus pleasantly with my imagination beside me, when my aunt nearly killed me one morning at breakfast. "Sophy, Sophy !" she cried out, "Snipkins tells me, the day you took your uncle for a walk on that dreadful damp path over the hill, you met Mr David Scott and talked with him for a long time. It was the day Edward wet his feet so dreadfully ! And Snipkins says you talked with Mr Scott for two whole hours ; and it was Harriet's brother Sam told Snipkins ; and it was Tom Bolster, Jack Jones's chief man, told Sam ; and Tom saw you from the road below. And, Sophy, you never told me you met Mr Scott ; and I never knew you were in the habit of walking alone, and meeting young gentlemen, and talking to them. You ought only to have bowed to Mr Scott, and you ought to have walked on ; and you ought not to have spoken to him, as your uncle had left you, and you had neither Catherine nor me to talk for you. And if you did speak to him, you ought to have told me the very instant you came home. Sophy, why did you never tell me you met him ?"

I blushed : what pain it is to blush when you know your blush invents a lying tale and gives suspicion of what does not exist ! Mrs Stewart's eye was upon me ; even Uncle Sherbrook laid down his blue-bubble and looked at me curiously. Was it a wonder that I blushed ?

"Why did you not tell me ?" repeated Aunt Jane. Oh cruelty of tactless people !—cruelty of near relations, who have a right to ask you every question before all the world—is there any cruelty surpassing yours ?

"Sophy, Sophy," asked my aunt again, "why did you not tell me you met him ?"

"I . . . I . . . I could not tell you, Aunt Jane," said I.

"By the by, Mrs Sherbrook," cried Mrs Stewart, "Lady Runaway has sent me her Society's most interesting report on the Christianising Influences of the Russian Arms in Turkestan. You shall hear what the report says. Now, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, here is something that will interest you."

Mrs Stewart astounded me. My heart filled with gratitude towards her, and I iminedately gave five shillings to her Christian Cossack—I, who had never given a penny to her postmen or her dogs, to her blacks, her Turks, or even to her French infidels.

I was intensely provoked with myself for not having told Aunt Jane, the instant I came home that day, how I had met Mr Scott, and how I had talked with him. But what I said to my aunt was only too true. I could not tell her. I had tried several times. I had carried her transitions to the very point, and my heart had failed me. I could not bring myself to tell her I had met him. I could not do so, because instinct revealed to me that I should raise an idea in that mind which I would hate to see—a detestable idea, which would destroy the ease I felt with David Scott, which would debase the beauty of those hours we had spent together, agitating the happiness, disturbing the holy calm, of that fair day,—a day I liked to think upon! —a day I had thought of till its memory was idealised within my soul. The cuckoo's note, the warble of the birds, the soft air breathing over the far-reaching land, the rapture of those distant voices, had left a hallowed joy in my heart which shrank from desecration. I feared Aunt Jane's remarks like sacrilege.

I knew my aunt to be possessed, as with an evil spirit, of the detestable notion that no unmarried lady or gentleman ever talked for five minutes together without there being some sort of flirtation between them. Preposterous, and, worst of all, most vulgarising idea! This mania alarmed me. I should not have dared to speak to any gentleman in Aunt Jane's presence, for I should have known exactly what was passing in her mind. Flirtation shocked her! Nothing is so indelicate as over-delicacy. I felt strongly on this point. It is all very well that Adonis should be supposed to fall in love with Venus at first sight. The thing is just possible, so it is not altogether laughable; but is it not laughable, monstrous, and painfully indelicate, that an agreeable man cannot talk for an hour or so to a plain woman without severely proper-minded relations imagining he is paying her decided attention, and taking fright accordingly?

Can anybody wonder that I should thus nervously have dreaded the sacrilege I knew would sully the charm and destroy the ideality of that constant companionship which I so loved?

Fear of this sacrilege drove me to walk on the back avenue again, as of old, with Aunt Jane at both sides of me. Her transitions kept me in a nervous fever; she was always touching on the subject I wished her to avoid. I had to watch her as a cat does a mouse.

Just before Whitsuntide an event occurred. Uncle Sherbrook got a letter from Mr David Scott begging, as a great favour, to

be allowed the right of trespassing on the path over the hill. Uncle Sherbrook was gravely delighted. He immediately sent a key, "trusting to Mr Scott's honour as a gentleman that the gates would never be left unlocked." Aunt Jane told me he used these words, and she knew, as she assisted in the study at the writing of Uncle Sherbrook's answer.

Mrs Stewart heard Mr Scott was coming down to Mineham the following week for two days.

My spirit sank. I knew this piece of news and Uncle Sherbrook's letter would swamp every thing and person in my aunt's mind except David Scott, and make her transitions quite unmanageable. Conceive, then, my delight at hearing Mrs Stewart exclaim, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, old Dan is over-eating himself, and getting too fat on your excellent fare. He will soon be good for nothing; so I really must insist on his drawing me up and down the back avenue every morning for an hour by your side. There is an old bath-chair in the coachhouse."

My aunt's skirts and the bath-chair quite filled up the higher level of the avenue, and that was the only part of the road Aunt Jane knew to be really dry. The lower sides she considered dangerously damp; and I must do her the justice to say she would not have permitted any one, not even her mortal enemy, to wet his feet in the gutter. Not that Aunt Jane let me stay at home! To her mind, the punctual morning walk was a duty which humanity owed its constitution. She never ceased lamenting that "Edward" would sit in his study till after luncheon. "Poor dear Edward! he seriously neglects his health, Catherine; and he is like you, Sophy—he does not take my advice." I was not permitted to do my duty towards my constitution by roaming where I liked, but I was allowed to walk a little behind Aunt Jane and her excellent Catherine, there not being room for the three of us in line.

I could then walk alone!—oh great delight!—alone with my imagination, where Aunt Jane had been; with the pleasant companion at each side of me! I went back to our interrupted communion with rapturous joy—the joy of the prisoner escaped from the jailer's questioning eye and tongue—the joy of the uncaged bird singing because there is an inspiration to sing in the open air. A sort of inspiration, bringing me a flow of thoughts and words to speak them as I felt them, came over me. The morning walk was all too short. The hour ended when it scarcely seemed to have begun.

I walked four mornings thus happily in never-ceasing delightful discourse. The fifth day it poured rain, so the best of

women lay on the sofa, and my aunt paced the drawing-room, doing her duty to her constitution and talking to her Catherine at the same time. "Sophy" took up a book. This was high treason ! so, for the sake of peace, I consented to walk up and down the room like Aunt Jane : by judiciously following exactly in her track, I managed she should run into me and tumble when she turned. After this shocking catastrophe, Sophy was told to sit quite out of the way in a distant corner of the room, but she was on no account to read ! Reading in the drawing-room, and not listening when your elders were talking, was bad manners.

The moment I found myself exiled to a nice quiet nook, my kind friend came to me and sat beside me. Time passed agreeably ; and so interested did I become in our pleasant conversation, that I never heard George open the door or announce a visitor. It is true I sat at a distance from the door, and with my back to it, seemingly gazing out of a window.

Of a sudden a voice struck my heart and made it leap with joy. I turned and saw Mr Scott standing beside Mrs Stewart's sofa. I rose in haste and went with outstretched hand towards him. Perhaps my sudden joy was too great, like great heat, which makes even what is warm feel cold ; for when I met him he seemed cold to me. It was from his own near presence that his voice had roused me, calling me from the imaginary to the real, the living man ; and yet I found the real man cold—more dead to me than the friend of my imagination. Oh joy driven back into the heart, what a pain you are ! I felt—or thought I felt—that Mr Scott and I were almost strangers. The shock took from me the power of speech. When he spoke to me, my answer died upon my lips, and Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart answered for me. I am sure I should quickly have recovered my presence of mind, only Mrs Stewart never took her eye off me, and Aunt Jane looked at me and looked at Mr Scott with the severe expression of a keen-sighted woman, who clearly perceives what even acute minds may not see, and who, moreover, is scandalised by the mere ghost of flirtation. A gentleman should never speak to a young lady until he has proposed to her father or mother, or to her aunt or uncle : this was the infallible dogma of the longest upper lip in Europe !

The look in Aunt Jane's face was alone enough to strike me dumb ; besides, I never could talk before her and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart. I never care to speak, indeed, I never can speak, unless I can talk quite naturally, and take my little fling as I go along. And I never could do this in the presence of these two admir-

able, fault-finding ladies. Aunt Jane would harp on for weeks and most likely weep over some stray expression which had come into my head and gone out of it at the same moment.

So Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart had the conversation all to themselves. The admirable Catherine became quite lively, though Mr Scott seemed to be in anything but an agreeable mood. I could see Aunt Jane bored him, and when bored, he does not conceal the fact very successfully. He paid a short visit. On rising to bid good-bye, he said, "Mrs Sherbrook, I am forgetting the chief object of my early call. I came to thank Mr Sherbrook for his kindness about that key. Tell him I will not leave the gates open ; tell him he has my word of honour for it."

"I think," remarked Aunt Jane, "you had better have that key oiled before you use it, Mr Scott, for I daresay it is very rusty. Edward has a great many of those keys in the study, because he thought a great many people living in the neighbourhood would apply for them when the lawsuit about the right-of-way ended in his favour ; but hardly anybody wanted them, so they have grown rather rusty, and Edward won't let the servants clean them, because, you see, he is afraid they might give them away to tramps and bad characters, and to all sorts of people, though my servants never would do such a thing—they are far too respectable ! but Edward has a great horror of having crowds of people walking through the place, though I tell him no sensible person would ever wish to walk on that path ; it is so very damp ! really quite dangerous ! and the last time Edward walked there he wet his feet. By the by, you met Sophy that last——"

I made a great effort, and wrested Aunt Jane's transition from her. "Mr Scott," I said, "it is just one o'clock ; surely you could stay to luncheon ?"

My aunt's face was not to be described, but the impossibility of asking any one to lunch without premeditation and Snipkins's previous consent, was clearly written there. Mr Scott saw how matters stood, and declared he could not possibly stay a moment longer ; his time was not his own ; he had come down to Dullshire on some business of Lady Arabella's : so he said good-bye, and shook hands. My hand trembled when it touched his.

"Mrs Sherbrook," he exclaimed, returning as with an after-thought—"Mrs Sherbrook," he said, speaking to Aunt Jane, but looking at me, "pray tell Mr Sherbrook I hope to use that new key to-morrow. Business takes me to Harefield. I will

go by train in the morning, but I will exercise my right to trespass in the afternoon."

"Oh, Mr Scott, Mr Scott!" cried Aunt Jane, "that damp path will be so dreadfully wet to-morrow! Oh, Mr Scott! you will catch your death of cold! and most likely it will rain to-morrow, just as it is raining to-day."

"No, no, Mrs Sherbrook," he replied; "it will not rain to-morrow. It will be fine." He looked at me again, and said slowly, "I wish it to be fine to-morrow." He paused, then added, "And I am a lucky man in weather, although lucky in nothing else! By Jove, lucky in nothing else!" And then he said, in the voice which marked his words, no matter what they were, upon my memory, "But perhaps my luck may turn some day; perhaps . . . to-morrow!"

I could not bear his steady gaze; I looked away.

My aunt exclaimed, "Oh, Mr Scott! don't think you will be lucky and live and not get consumption if you go deliberately wetting your feet, for at your age you will fall into consumption and die of a bad cold. Any man may die of consumption till he is past thirty, and I know you are not thirty yet. And now, Mr Scott, I will tell you what to do; come round by the front avenue, and then go straight on, and I will tell William Snipkins to let you out by the back-avenue gate. Damp places are so very dangerous, especially in the afternoon. They are quite poisonous at sunset, and they are full of miasma, and malaria, and ague, and fever, and sore throats, and dreadful colds of every kind and description; and I am never out at sunset, Mr Scott—never! not even walking on the front avenue, though the front avenue is always perfectly dry, for there is something peculiar in the soil."

"You are wise, Mrs Sherbrook," said Mr Scott, with surprising gravity—"very wise! I will take your advice, and not be out at sunset."

I felt his speaking eye again upon me, and looked up. "I mean," he said, "to walk over that dangerous path to-morrow about three o'clock; but not later! Do not be alarmed, Mrs Sherbrook!"—and he repeated, still looking at me, "Not later!" So saying, he went away, but in going he turned, looked back at me, and smiled. As if by magic, I forgot all painful doubts and fears, and felt once more he was no stranger to me, but a friend with whom I was at ease.

I became very angry with myself for having lost my nerve, and voice, and power of speech in his presence. But my anger soon ceased to chide me, and spent itself upon Aunt Jane and

Mrs Stewart. If they had not been by, thought I, I should have met him and talked to him quite naturally. I know I should. I felt it was their presence paralysed my courage and my tongue, and not his fancied coldness—a coldness which did not exist! He was not cold to me! So I threw the blame of my confusion upon others, and looked forward in hopeful joy to the morrow—when I will go, thought I, to meet him on the path over the hill, and being alone, I shall be myself again, and he will be at ease with me, and I with him.

The idea of not going to meet him never entered my head. Had he not said to me as clearly as he could, that he would await me next day at three o'clock? Then, and no later; so that I knew the exact time he would be there, and I could not pretend to ignore it. When he had named the hour of our meeting, I had felt as if he were giving me a hope in life.

I liked to dwell upon the morrow. I longed to think of it unceasingly till I should forget the annoyance of to-day. But I could not. I dared not let my imagination wander far. I had to watch Aunt Jane carefully, and I spent the whole afternoon and evening in nervous dread of what she might say before my uncle and "Catherine." I was beginning to fear Aunt Jane even more than Mrs Stewart, for this latter incomprehensible woman kept entirely to the Cossacks, and never once alluded to Mr Scott's visit. In his presence, it is true, she had fixed that dreadful eye of hers upon me, but when he went away she had never looked at me again. She left me in peace, and amazed me! I was grateful to her; and then my gratitude surprised me.

I wearily watched Aunt Jane's transitions until bed-time. That night I lay awake for hours: my eyes were wide open, and I lay dreaming, if it can be called dreaming to see and hear and realise vividly with a most wakeful imagination. In those night-hours I realised the morrow just as if the sun were up and shining. I walked by the path over the hill; passing the second gate, I went on through the wood, and I saw David Scott coming towards me. I felt no shyness, but met him gladly; and he was kind, not cold to me. I liked to linger over this our pleasant meeting. I liked to feel his presence, and to see the whole scene clearly before my eyes. I could not tire of the sight! I loved to dwell upon it, as we love to dwell upon the happy hours of life. I waited amidst the peaceful woods, breathing their calm delight, and then I saw him with vivid clearness come towards me. I beheld him in unabashed joy; and again and again I dwelt upon our pleasant meeting.

I cannot say if I really slept at all that night, or if, having slept, I awoke next morning. Sleeping or waking, it now seems to me I still was dreaming. I lay under a spell: no fears troubled me, and uncommon events seemed natural, predestined. They did not even astonish me. I was not a bit surprised at breakfast to hear Mrs Stewart arrange that she and Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook should drive to Vottingham in the afternoon, starting punctually at a quarter past two. Mrs Stewart said the glass was rising. When the horses had already been out twice in the week, and two ladies wanted to drive twelve miles on the top of all this previous exercise, it required but little diplomacy to make Uncle Sherbrook take a seat on the box, in order to keep a strict eye on the hills. And then Vottingham was the one place my uncle could easily be tempted to visit, because he bought his pens in Vottingham—particular pens, only to be found at one particular shop! And pens were to him what reels of cotton were to Aunt Jane—he let no one choose them but himself.

Any other day of my life, the good luck which was to leave “Sophy” at home by herself would have filled me with a burst of joyful amazement. But this day I heard the good news unmoved, as if I had been told it beforehand. Had I not known that I should walk alone this day? I had somehow known it long ago. So certain did I feel of it, that I had never even thought how it might come to pass. I feared no obstacle thrust across my path, preventing the meeting, which I believed in, because I saw it taking place before my eyes. No matter where I went, I gazed upon the woodland scene, feeling I never could gaze enough. I gazed all the morning as I walked on the back avenue, and thought of the happy moment an hour or two must now bring forth.

The carriage started, and I took the keys and set off, walking slowly towards the path over the hill. There was time. Besides, if I had started an hour too late, in my dream-like state I should not have hurried. The scene I had so long dwelt upon had never varied. It was always I who, arriving first, waited in the wood till he came towards me. I knew the very tree where I must wait for him. I walked in quiet composure, dream-engrossed, noting nothing.

I unlocked and locked the gates mechanically. I did not stop to look upon the far-reaching country or the distant hills. I was blind till I came to the tree where I should await him. How well I knew the old beech’s blasted stump! It stood apart, with a patch of bare earth between it and the woodland

path. There was a thick tangle of brushwood at a little distance behind the big tree, but still on the same raised ground.

I leant against the beech: being on a knoll, the path seemed to dive away from me, and to dive by slow degrees deeper and deeper, until it reached what was called the upper Harefield gate. There was no lodge to this gate; it was opened by one of the right-of-way keys. From where I stood I had a view through the wood over the whole length of the path, and I could see the gate at either end—the upper Harefield gate, and the meadow-gate I had just come through.

I looked towards Harefield. I waited for him. Calm and patient I waited, not in hope, but in perfect trust. I knew he would come. I felt his near presence: it did not agitate me to feel as if he were already by my side. I looked, and in the far distance I saw him. He was walking towards me through the sunlit woods, just as I had seen him in my waking dreams. There was no jarring difference in the scene suddenly to destroy illusion; and yet, from the moment I beheld him, the spell which bound me was broken. It was the cold stranger I seemed to see, and not the warm, the sympathetic friend. I dreaded the cold stranger. I feared again to lose my nerve and voice, ay, and even my senses, in his presence. As he drew nearer, my heart began to beat, and it beat so loudly that a panic seized me. I rushed from where I had been standing and hid myself in the tangled brushwood close by.

The beech-tree shut out the view towards Harefield from my hiding-place, so I could only see that bit of the path which leads to the meadow-gate. David Scott was lost to sight. Every moment I thought to see him stand beside the old tree; but he was a long, long time in coming! I thought he would never come!

At last I heard approaching footsteps. I had listened for them; yet when I heard them, I started as if the sound were strange and unexpected. The footsteps drew still nearer. I held my breath, for I knew they would stop at the old beech-tree; but they did not stop. I could not believe my ears. I looked, and saw that David Scott had indeed passed on—passed on without an instant's hesitation! The cold stranger had ruthlessly passed on!

I felt there was a gulf between us. Our pleasant meeting by the beech-tree, which I had dwelt upon till I believed in its reality, had never, then, been seen by him! What sympathy had he with me, if the one thought of my mind had never been the thought of his? I drew my dress more closely round me,

and hid myself deeper in the brushwood. I feared intensely that he might see me and return. I now hated the idea of meeting him. His coldness, I thought, would kill me!

Oh sudden rush of rapturous joy! I saw him stop and lean upon the gate where he and I had met before. He waited, then, for me, and thought to see me as I had seen him, coming up through the meadow from the land of far-off voices! He looked towards the distant hills as I had looked, and looking, dreamt that happy, holy day—the day I never could forget!

“Oh, I will go and meet him now!” cried I; “it is for me that he is waiting!” He turned as if he heard a sound. He looked towards my hiding-place; and I—fool that I was! —I became a coward again. I had not the courage to step out before his eyes, and show him I was hiding like a thief, watching him, dogging his steps in secret. I shrank, too, from the questions he would ask. Why had I hidden from him at all? Could I say I had come to meet him, and had waited for him? Could I tell how a panic had seized me at the first sight of him, making my heart beat, and my nerve fail me? I felt I could not tell the truth; and then what else could I tell him? Would not a lie dry up my tongue, and make me speechless in his presence? I knew I might have lied to all the world before I could have lied to him. I knew that at his word my lips would speak the whole most strange, perplexing truth.

So I lay deeply hidden in the protecting brushwood. The fresh green leaves were like good friends to me, covering from sight my tortured heart; for it was torn and dragged, between the torture of longing to break forth and go to him, and the torture of fearing to go.

David Scott waited—still waited on for me! The time seemed endless to me. He may only have waited some ten minutes, or he may have waited a long hour. At last he climbed the gate and went slowly away.

When he was quite lost to sight, I felt as if I should never see him again on earth. An agony of remorse took hold of me. He had been there almost beside me, and he had waited for me—he had told me he would wait, and I knew he would! Yet I had shrunk away from him, and had not gone to him; and now, thought I, he will never, never come again! Oh the pain of that thought! I hated myself. I despised and loathed my cowardly self.

Bursting from my prison, I rushed onwards to try and overtake him before he had gone too far. The craving to meet

him, to speak to him, if only one word, mastered every other feeling in my soul. My regret was intolerable. The passion of it dimmed my eyes with scalding tears. A burning tear fell upon my hand and startled me. I stopped in my headlong haste. I gazed and wondered. I am not given to tears. There was, then, a reality about this grief of mine, which had no dream in it! It was a real tear, so it frightened me. What was this passion, like the passions of childhood, which could make me weep? I tried to gather my senses together, for they were quite distraught. I tried to reason on this strange passion of remorseful regret, and then on those other feelings which rushed upon me, overwhelming me, and for which I found no name. I could not understand this strange confusion of the soul and brain. But in trying to unravel it, a thought struck me—a terrifying thought! I spurned it from me, but it would come back to me again and yet again! It took possession of me, and was in my heart, and on my conscience, and before my eyes, till I could see nothing else in all the world but it, and conceive no other thought—as if it were so all-devouring, that where it lived, no other thought could live.

A great fear had seized me, and the pain as of a great shame. I feared, then knew, I loved this man. This was the thought which filled my heart and mind and soul, and stood before my eyes, staring at me, and reproaching me with madness and with shame.

I buried my face in my hands. The sun was too bright for my burning cheeks—it lighted up my shame. I longed for night to cover me—for a darkness so thick that it might hide my thought even from myself.

CHAPTER XXXII.

“Well, Sophy,” said the admirable Catherine, in her cheerfully hard, “happy release” tone of voice—“well, Sophy, I hope you had a pleasant walk yesterday afternoon? and a pleasant meeting with Mr David Scott?”

“I did not meet him!” cried I, fiercely; “I did not! I tell you I did not!” My voice trembled with passion and fear. The best of women forgot her ankle in sheer amazement, and started off the sofa, dropping her tatting, and letting her bag

fall to the ground : the cotton, the tracts, and the collecting-cards littered the floor. I left the room, and let her pick up the rubbish herself.

Thank heaven, Aunt Jane was not by at the time ! As yet, she had asked me no disagreeable questions, because she had no suspicions—she thought I had walked alone on the front avenue. One of the race of front-lodge Snipkins had told her so, or rather, told the invaluable Sarah, who told her. It had happened, when the truth had stood revealed to my sight, like an angel with a flaming sword barring the path which would have led me to David Scott had I rushed onwards, that I had turned and gone home another way. There was a grass road leading from the upper Harefield gate to the front avenue.

I was relieved beyond measure to find Aunt Jane imagined I had walked up and down that hateful front avenue, expecting, as I did, to undergo a cross examination about the exact place where I had wet my feet. But this sense of relief was short-lived : it was a moment's happiness doomed to die quickly, and be followed by a torturing fear. Now that I had a thought to hide from every eye and tongue, life became a fear, and little else but a fear, to me. When Aunt Jane spoke to me suddenly, I would start as if I thought she had discovered my secret, and were going to tell me so, and to talk of it aloud, not understanding it was a sacred agony to me.

Mrs Stewart's presence also became a nervous terror to me. I dared not raise my face to hers ; for when I met her eye, that eye saw my secret. I never was made to keep a secret ! I felt I could not hide it ; every one who spoke to me suspected it. How I feared to hear David Scott's name mentioned ! I schooled myself to hear it unmoved ; yet I trembled each morning when the post-bag was opened in public at the breakfast-table, knowing how a letter from Lady Arabella would make that name a subject of discussion. I always sat with my back to the light, like Aunt Jane's Jesuit, fearing that name would make me colour, and betray myself. It unnerves you to feel you dare not trust your friend ; yet what is that to feeling you can put no faith in yourself, but may at any moment turn traitor to yourself ? I had no longer any confidence in my strength and nerve, so my secret became a sleepless dread. I felt intensely what the shame of its betrayal would be to me. A pretty woman, accustomed almost from childhood to love and to be loved, and to think she flatters whoever she is in love with, shows her feelings quite naturally, because there is no disgrace for her in loving, when it is most likely, even certain,

she must be loved in return. Such a happy fairy can have no conception of the pain, the regretful sorrow, and the shame which fill, as with an agony, the heart of the poor, plain, unattractive creature who, quite by accident, without thinking of love, has fallen in love. Had I foreseen the misfortune, it could never have happened to me. When, pining in my solitude of soul, I entertained the pleasant companion, it was a kind friend in my sore need and no lover who came to me. The idea of my ever loving any one had naturally never struck me, because I was aware no one could love me. Ugly, heavy, unattractive as I am, I knew my love was an insult to a man like David Scott.

When the thought I hated stood staring at me, there was no hope in it—not one moment's illusion! From the first I was sure, quite sure, David Scott had waited for me at the gate, solely to talk about himself—about his disappointment in love and life. He knew I would listen to him; perhaps no one else would. I did not deceive myself with the delusion that his waiting for me was a sign of any other feeling. It was not my vanity, but my imagination, which had gone mad. I now thought with horror of what would have happened had I broken forth to meet him that time in the wood. I looked upon the remorse I suffered when he went away as upon the ecstasy of insanity.

I saw our meeting as it would have been. I felt he would have quickly known my love. I saw his look of scorn. I felt his scorn, and I writhed beneath it: it lashed my pride with shame as with a whip, insulting, degrading its dignity. I turned away from such a sight as this, then turned to look at it, at him again. I never could bear the pain of shame, not even as a child; yet I dwelt upon this scene, and could not tear my thoughts away.

“Am I mad?” cried I, at last arousing myself from this nightmare—“am I mad, that I should like to dwell upon this humbling of my pride, this scorning of my love, better than not to think of that man, or not to see him at all?” I strove with my whole might not to think of him. I fled from the absorbing thought as from the greatest enemy I had on earth. Night and day, I made an effort not to think of him or see him; but never for a moment could I forget I was making this great effort.

Consider, all ye who must despise me—oh, consider, and have pity, when you think what the pleasant companion was to me! Consider the enchantment of agreeability and wit to one whom

everybody takes for granted is created expressly to be bored ! Plain girls, hidden behind some aunt, or in the far-distant background of a family, have a fearful temptation towards love—far greater than the pretty ones ; for the pretty find some satisfaction in life, and the plain too often find none. Yet is there no excuse made on earth for the plain woman's unreturned love. I knew neither man nor woman would excuse me. I alone excused myself. I laid the blame of this love, born in my heart unknown to me, on the life I was forced to lead.

The loneliness of this life, its heart starvation, its mental pain, did plead for me powerfully with my own conscience. But oh ! thought I, in this world there is no pity for the bitter pain of the mind, which in starving misery clutches at its own wild inventions as at bread. Physically, mentally imprisoned, I had craved for something that would satisfy in life. I clearly saw how the life the Sherbrooks had invented, was fearfully well suited to drive the imagination mad ; and the imagination is so delicate, so sensitive a part of us, that it may easily be driven mad. While the heat of youth still warms our blood, the imagination will not give up the ghost and die, but will live to rule and ruin us, if we dare to bind it down and starve it in some narrow cell. Once driven to madness, it can and will break all bonds of reason and of sense, for it is not the mere dead wooden doll elderly and "awakened" men and women like to think it.

"A curse, then, be on those," I cried, "who forget their youth !—who think the energy of a life not yet grown old, unnatural, and who starve the affections, and forbid the heart and mind that satisfaction which made their own youth a joy and not a sorrow to themselves !"

No sooner did I hear these words of mine, spoken aloud to myself in anger, than I was sorry I had cursed the poor old Sherbrooks. They had not meant to make my life unhappy or to drive me to madness. They had only been unsympathetic and very blind ; and blindness is not a sin in those who have no eyes—who are born not to see, being sent into the world without the faculty of perception. My heart smote me, and I was glad no one heard my words but myself, for they were cruel and unjust. It was remorse and bitter disquietude of soul, and a sort of contradictory repentance searching for an excuse, which drew the curse from me. At times I was frightened by the change I felt irritating despair and fear were working in me. I felt myself growing cruel and fierce, and to like hatred better than love.

It was summer, and the days were fine ; the leaves were on the trees, the sky was blue, and the very air was such it should have breathed upon my heart and softened it. Yet I, to whom beauty is a great delight, found no joy, no peace, in the calm loveliness of earth and sky. There seemed to be no more peace for me in life. How could there be peace ? I lived with the hourly dread beside me, where the pleasant companion had been : fear had taken its place, but even fear could not fill it. I felt that absence at every step I took.

Mrs Stewart had soon tired of the back avenue. I walked there again each morning, alone with Aunt Jane. Mrs Stewart was allowed to stay indoors until after luncheon—"because, Sophy, you know," said Aunt Jane, "Catherine is occupied in a good work." The good woman was said to be "dressing up" for publication the reports of the societies whose paid secretary she was. How I wished I might have been allowed to stay at home, under any pretence whatever ! I should willingly have "dressed up" blacks and whites from sinners into saints, and for nothing ! Any occupation is better than none ; and the turning of sinners into saints is by no means hard work, if you have once got the knack of the thing, and learnt the peculiar language.

Besides embellishing and sanctifying reports, Mrs Stewart wrote innumerable letters. The charitable societies paid the postage of the official but not always of the private letters. The admirable Catherine rarely had stamps of her own, so she "borrowed" Aunt Jane's.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart kept up some sort of correspondence with every person "worth knowing" she had ever been introduced to, even casually, during the course of her energetic existence. She constantly wrote to Jumping Georgy. There was nothing surprising in this. She may have been kindly recommending cooks to Lady Tutterton, and to all Lady Tutterton's friends : she often said Sir Horace Tutterton might be very useful some day to poor dear Gordon-Sherbrook, if poor dear Gordon-Sherbrook stayed in the army. The astonishing part of the matter was, that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone sometimes answered these letters. People did not invariably answer Mrs Stewart's letters.

Jumping Georgy wrote abruptly, in the most characteristic style imaginable. Letters, which are no test of an Englishman's mind or nature, are, in nine cases out of ten, a very fair test of an Englishwoman's. The Drill-sergeant's letters were as short and peremptory as her manner, and there was a great

deal of high-stepping action in her handwriting, and all from right to left. Mrs Stewart has often told me that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has the most intense contempt for any lady who writes what is called a pleasant letter. She thinks all letters ought to be on business of one sort or another, and keep strictly to the point. The Drill-sergeant takes great pride in her own military invoices, where none of the items are joined together, but jump forwards, like sharpshooters, each with an independent jerk of its own. Those who know her best, say she considers her own style a model of the right sort of style—of the only sort suited to a lady of position, sense, and action.

One day in the beginning of July, Mrs Stewart gave me a letter she had received from Jumping Georgy, and told me to read it. I read—

"DEAR MRS SHERBROOK-STEWART,—My mother does not want a cook. Lady Furley wants a kitchen-maid. Louisa Clarke is engaged to Fred Tankney. He can make a good settlement. We are all perfectly satisfied. Lady Furley wants the kitchen-maid next week. I direct this to Sherbrook Hall.—Very sincerely yours, GEO. RIGARDY-WRENSTONE.

“P.S.—Sorry your ankle is no better.”

Mrs Stewart watched me while I read. Her eye met mine, and killed the mad joy which had rushed into my heart unawares when I saw and realised that Louisa Clarke was engaged to be married, and not to David Scott. The pang of joy passed like sudden frenzy; and then I persuaded myself I sorely regretted David Scott was not the man to whom Louisa was engaged, though I thought Louisa unworthy of him. I fancied that I longed for some insurmountable barrier to be placed between us, so as to prevent others from suspecting my love. I told myself, if he were once engaged, watchful suspicion would cease, and the eyes which knew me so well that they saw and recognised every little change of my countenance, would look at me no more. Oh the pain of living in a very narrow circle, face to face with tactless observation all the long hours of endless days! Who has not felt this wearying pain can hardly imagine it.

At last the dreaded time arrived when people left London and came down to the country.

Mrs Stewart heard the Scotts were at Mineham. "I declare, Mrs Sherbrook," she exclaimed one morning at breakfast,

"there is a letter for you from Lady Arabella. Mr Sherbrook has just taken it out of the post-bag."

While Aunt Jane was carefully cutting open the top of the envelope, she wondered if Lady Arabella wrote to say she and Mr Scott would call to-day, "or perhaps to-morrow, or the next day. But what are you looking at, Sophy?" she cried. "What do you see out of that window? Catherine, what is Sophy looking at? I can see nobody walking on the grass." My back was turned to the admirable Catherine's eye, and yet I knew it was fixed upon me. Her voice laughed hardly as she said, "Sophy is always gazing at some one, Mrs Sherbrook, whom neither you nor I can see. Sophy has her own secret, and she keeps it to herself."

I was sitting next my uncle, and I saw he heard Mrs Stewart's words. He raised his eyes from the post-bag and looked at me intently, to my utter confusion. Fortunately, Lady Arabella's envelope was open, and Aunt Jane had hastily begun to read the letter while her Catherine was still speaking.

"Oh, Catherine, Catherine!" she exclaimed, joyfully, "here is an invitation for you, and me, and Sophy, to go to Mineham, and to stay there three days. And, only fancy! Lady Arabella asks Sophy twice over, at the beginning and at the end of her letter, though she only asks you once!"

"Once is enough," replied Mrs Stewart. "I will certainly go to Mineham, and so will you, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, and so will Sophy. Sophy must come, and shall come."

This was said in the most decided rasp of that decided voice. Had Mrs Stewart spoken more gently, she might not have roused my mean spirit to action; but that voice betrayed her determination to have her will, not mine, obeyed, and so stung even the wretched coward within me, and drove it to fight with her, and win the day while there was time.

"Mrs Stewart," I said, "no power on earth shall make me go to Mineham against my will; and it is against my will to go there." I rose from table, and, standing beside my uncle, I laid my hand upon his shoulder. I remembered how I had once leant on his strong arm in the weakness of a great sorrow. "Mrs Stewart," I said, "Uncle Sherbrook will protect me from your tyranny; I know he will. He has always been a strong-hearted friend to me in trouble."

"Sophy," said my uncle, gravely,—Aunt Jane looked positively awestruck when he spoke,—"Sophy, I am glad you appeal to me for protection. As I am aware you are not deficient in mental capacity, I feel justified in believing that

your disinclination to accept Lady Arabella's invitation comes from some good reason, better known to yourself than to Mrs Stewart. Mrs Stewart and your Aunt Jane will go to Mineham, while you and I, Sophy, will remain comfortably at home."

The clever Catherine gave my uncle no answer, but she looked alarmingly angry. It took Aunt Jane some little time to recover from the silent awe into which a speech from "Edward" invariably threw her. Her silence lasted rather longer than usual. I imagined she could not understand why Sophy had spoken to her uncle, or why her uncle had spoken to Catherine. I thought she looked somewhat red, and jealous too. At length she exclaimed—"I must say, Edward, I do wonder you can think Sophy has any mental capacity at all, because I think her the least clever person I ever knew; and indeed I never like her to stay at home alone with you, because when I am away she sits in the study talking nonsense to you, and always makes you wet your feet besides, or do something dangerous and dreadful! But, Catherine, if Sophy says she will not go to Mineham, you may be quite sure she won't, because Sophy always will do exactly what she likes, and never will take anybody's advice, and her poor dear mother would not either! So you and I had better go without her, and then there will be room for Snipkins, and my hand-bag, and my brown shawl, on the same seat with your ankle, Catherine, in the close carriage; and I am always so afraid of Snipkins getting a sunstroke in the dickey."

Mrs Stewart only said, "Ah! exactly," and let Aunt Jane talk on. My uncle was now reading a blue-bubble, so it did not much matter what my aunt said.

On attempting to get up from table, Mrs Stewart uttered a startling scream. Aunt Jane flew to her assistance. Poor dear Catherine's ankle was not so well as usual! Poor dear Catherine believed she had just given the foot a twist! Catherine lay on the sofa for the whole of that day, and for the next, and for a week afterwards.

The visit to Mineham was out of the question.

Mrs Stewart tried hard to get an invitation to Sherbrook Hall for Lady Arabella and Mr David Scott. Aunt Jane made no objection because Snipkins made none, but Uncle Sherbrook proved quite unmanageable! Mrs Stewart was very angry,—not that she dared show her anger to him! I heard her say to Aunt Jane, bitterly rasping her voice—"Mr Sherbrook has got some ridiculous idea in his head. I see it plainly." But she did not say what the idea was. "Mrs Sherbrook," she continued, intensifying the bitterness of the rasp—"Mrs Sherbrook, Sophy

is the only person in this house who can and will rule her uncle."

It is not necessary to repeat all Aunt Jane said when thus excited to jealousy. She was huffy with me for days afterwards. If you are in good spirits, huffy people are depressing; but if your heart be sad and heavy, they drive you to despair. They are the most dreadful people to be with in sorrow, for you feel in their presence as if life never could be anything but a senseless, hopeless misery. I was wretched; and the one thought I fain would avoid, haunted me more cruelly than ever.

I could not endure the idea of meeting David Scott in Mrs Stewart's presence. I saw she was determined we should meet under her piercing eye, and instinct told me that she wanted to see me reveal my own secret to her sight, and that she would make me do so. I was sure of it. She would cheerfully enjoy the agony of my heart, thought I. I saw myself betray my secret to this woman's horrid eye; and, worst of all, I betrayed it in her presence to David Scott. I saw the scene. No effort could prevent me from seeing it.

Mrs Stewart looked as if she had some intrigue on hand, for her uneasy eyes took no rest. This was always a bad sign of her. When Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was not tatting, she winked till you felt your own eyes winking. When she tatted, she tatted furiously, and winked less. I wondered what she could be intriguing about—if it were about the Duchess of Wildfire? or the Cossacks? or about me? I began to suspect it really was me, she knotted so irritably into her tatting. My suspicions once roused, I grew more and more certain of the fact.

At length one day Mrs Stewart came down to luncheon gorgeously attired in her best black silk—a magnificent affair, all jet and lace! She was a miser, and never wore a good dress without a good reason. So the signs of the times were unmistakable! I knew she expected visitors, and I could not but guess who they must be. Mrs Stewart invariably put on her best dress for Lady Arabella; for her ladyship was not like Aunt Jane, who considered piety and pokey dowdiness a dogma one and indivisible.

I kept my own counsel, made no remark, and seemed to notice nothing; but I just watched my opportunity, and when Mrs Stewart's back was turned, I slipped from the room unobserved, and escaped from the house by one of the open windows, without even a hat on my head.

I ran on by the garden-gate down into the glen, and then turning to the left, I took refuge in Aunt Jane's crockery-

rockery summer-house—a damp place my aunt never went to now, and where, I was well aware, no one would think of looking for me. I knew Mrs Stewart would imagine I had fled to the path over the hill.

I thought nothing in this world could have made me stay to meet David Scott. Terror-stricken, I shunned him, though I longed, I craved to see him. I had been so miserable since the day I first knew I loved him, that my spirit was broken, and I felt I had not self-command to play a part.

I had feared with a great fear to hear his voice. This fear, more than any other, had made me run away from the chance of meeting him.

As I sat alone in the summer-house, I thought how strangely his voice ever moved me. I heard the sound of carriage-wheels, and realised he must be very near me now—just in the house close by. Thus thinking, my imagination seemed to feel his presence; and it heard his voice—that voice I dreaded to hear, and from which I had fled like a craven coward! And yet I heard it again, and it overcame me with strong delusion. The absorbing thought took possession of me. I had not strength to fight against it any more.

I remembered the day I had seen David Scott rise from the land of my pleasant dreams, and I lived in his presence again. The old feeling of sympathy and ease returned to my heart; the pleasant companion was beside me once more, and I dreamt a happy dream.

Like all dreamers, I grew to forget my waking fears. Little by little the spell of illusion took such powerful hold upon me, that even my horror of meeting David Scott in Mrs Stewart's sight became effaced from my mind. Incredible as this may appear, the fact was so. But nothing seems strange to the dreamer! change is no change to him!

The spell was still upon me when at last I left the summer-house and walked towards home. I had noticed the lengthening shadows on the lawn. I went dreaming along by the path through the laurel-grove, and then on by the garden-wall.

As I drew nearer the house, I quickened my steps, for the hope of meeting David Scott had seized my heart like sudden passion. It may be, thought I, that I am not yet too late!

But I was too late. I knew it the instant I saw Mrs Stewart—she was dressed in her old gown. She lay in the open air on a sofa outside the Corinthian porch. She was alone. “Sophy,” cried she, starting up, “come here! quite

near to me ! I have something to tell you—something you will be glad to hear."

I did as she bid me, although I trembled when I drew near her, for her cruel voice filled me with a vague terror. I feared I knew not what.

The admirable Catherine fixed her eye upon me and smiled a nasty, little, bitter smile. Before speaking, she settled herself comfortably, and leant her elbow on a cushion, and her cheek upon her hand. "Sophy," she said, piercing her hard words into my brain, "David Scott came here this afternoon to bid us and you good-bye. He leaves Mineham early, very early, to-morrow morning. He waited for you until he could wait no more. You did not wish to see him. I know you did not ! And you would not come. So now I give you joy, as you have missed the chance for ever."

"For ever !" I said, seizing her arm and wrenching her hand from her cold, unblushing cheek ; "you lie, Mrs Stewart ! —you lie !"

The smile lurked still in the tightened corners of her mouth. She loosened her arm from my grasp, and said—"Not quite so hard a grip, Sophy, if you please." With undisturbed composure, she continued—"And so I lie, do I indeed ! and you imagine I believe David Scott never spoke to you of his affairs ? From my experience of him, I consider that to be the subject on which he can talk, and . . . the only one ! But perhaps you fancy, Sophy, I think you never even met him in the wood ?"

I turned from the woman and felt I hated her.

"Tell me I lie, my dear !" she cried ; "say it again, and as politely as before. Tell me you never walked over the hill to meet him ! Tell me you never met David Scott at all ! and say he never told you that his career being ruined and gone in this country, he intended to seek another in the colonies ! Never, Sophy, I am sure of it—never !"

"What do you mean ?" I asked ; "you mean something cruel, for I hear it in your voice. Have pity !" I cried—"have pity, Mrs Stewart, and tell me quickly !" I could say no more, for a fear greater than any I had yet known overwhelmed me. I stood before the woman imploring her mercy, with clasped hands ; and she seemed to take pleasure in my misery, and to prolong it purposely.

At last she said, slowly accentuating her words, and cutting them like knives into my heart—"David Scott leaves Mineham at five to-morrow morning, and sails from Sheerness towards evening. He is bound for New Zealand."

My lips were parted, but could frame no word.

“For New Zealand,” repeated Mrs Stewart; “it is a long way off, Sophy! And he came to say a last good-bye, yet you would not even see him.”

I could breathe no sound, not even a cry of sorrow. I stood speechless, like one struck dead by lightning in the very midst of life. I was only conscious of one thought, one anguish—he came to say a last good-bye, and I would not even see him!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

When after long blindness our eyes are first opened, it is by the clearness of things quite near to us, and yet hitherto unperceived, that we realise how painfully intense the dimness of our vision has been. There is no deadness of sight, thought I, like the densely veiled eye of self-consciousness, for this is a blindness which does not strive to see: engrossed in self-gazing, it does not look abroad, and so is blind without knowing it.

When I believed David Scott to be gone for ever, scales seemed to fall from my eyes, and I saw standing out right before me, with painful clearness, what had been hidden from my sight till now. I saw how entirely my own selfish thoughts and fears had preoccupied my mind, engrossing its imagination, which is its sympathy. I saw all this so clearly, that I wondered indignantly I had not seen it before. That day when David Scott named the hour I should meet him on the hill, I doubt not, thought I, but he meant to tell me how the one career he longed after in this country had become a lost hope to him, and how disappointment and despair were driving him to a distant land. Away, far away, beyond the seas! I knew how he hated the idea of the colonies, and how he loved the career he had lost. I remembered how eloquently he had spoken of the time when his ambition and his hopes were roused. I could hear his words again.

He came to me, thought I, hoping for the sympathy he could not find elsewhere, and I hid away from him and gave him none! Yet the first word of sympathy which fell upon the loneliness of my own life, came from his kind lips.

I saw that, seized by the shy panic of a selfish passion, I had forgotten to be a friend to him, and had only remembered to

befriend myself. I grieved over the painful sight. I would fain have been blinded once more, since he was gone from me for ever, and remorse could not bring him back again. But remorse will bear no bandage on her eye: her sting is in that eye, which sleeps neither by day nor by night, but sees with cruel clearness what we never thought to see. I was forced to look at my unsympathising selfishness, and I shrank from the sight in vain. I now saw my conduct as it really was, and I could no longer understand my one-sided preoccupation. So passionately did I crave to recall the past, that the new feeling drove away the old ones, and I could not even grasp them, much less understand them: they had flown like birds that spread their wings and leave no trace of their flight in the air.

I grew insensible to the admirable Catherine's eye, and I forgot to fear Aunt Jane. When in real sorrow, we think only of our grief. "He is gone, and I shall not see him again! He is gone, and without one kind word from me! gone as a stranger would go!" This sorrow ached in my heart.

I did not care to guard my secret now—indeed I remembered it no more. I said openly that I must be alone—that I could not bear to talk and be talked to. Aunt Jane exclaimed loudly, as if I were mad, at hearing me speak thus; but Mrs Stewart had compassion on me, and managed to take my aunt and uncle off driving to Vottingham.

In our deepest sorrow, there is a strange, irresistible attraction to the scene of our greatest joy. Perhaps without our knowing it, we hope our joy may yet be breathing there—perhaps we fancy it only sleeps, and we hope to awake it. This feeling is like the one which brings us back again to gaze upon the dead, and to see with our own eyes if the fearful stillness has not moved.

It was thus, once more to gaze upon the joy which lay dead, that I walked, when left alone, on the path over the hill.

I stopped where David Scott and I had stopped that day to hear the cuckoo; but the voice was silent in the wood.

No violet bloomed upon the bank where I had sat, and I looked and I longed, but David did not stand where he had stood before. The scene was changed, and all its brightness gone! I had come to see and feel if maybe the joy of spring breathed still in the summer air, or throbbed in the full beauty of the harvest-laden land, or whispered in the far-off voices, or moved amongst the trees. But I found no breath, nor pulse of joy; and when I cast myself upon the scentless bank, it was

beside the dead I lay. I felt there was no hope of returning life to that dead joy,—dead it was, never to rise again !

The parting from joy and him I loved had not one hope in it. Where I had heard that thrilling voice, it now was silent, and I knew would never strike my heart again. I felt David Scott was dead to me for ever and for ever ; and yet my love still lived to know there was no hope.

The sorrow of this thought benumbed me, as sorrow will ; and though I raised myself and looked towards the distant hills, I saw nothing in the view before me but the dead joy of a bygone day. I was blind to all else, and deaf to every sound.

At last, with a great effort, I rose to leave. Why should I sit gazing for ever upon a sorrow in which there was no hope ?

I turned to go, but started back in sudden, astounded dread. I seemed to see David Scott looking at me with the eager glance I knew so well, and he seemed to lean upon the gate close by, just as he had leant that day over the lost joy of which I mourned.

I passed my hand across my eyes to wipe away the mocking vision, yet found I had not dimmed its startling vividness. Stricken with terror, I stared, and could not understand, when lo ! the voice I never thought to hear again, vibrated through my soul.

The rapture of that sound stilled all life and thought within me. I stood like some cold statue whose ears and heart are made of stone.

David drew near, quite near to me, and spoke kind words, softly soothing my dumb terror. He took my hand and held it in his warm grasp. It was he indeed ! I saw the living fire of his eye, and suddenly I remembered the secret which I should hide from him. I felt that to his eye my love was written in my face ; so I turned away my head, shading my face with the hand that was free.

I heard him implore me to speak. I could not speak ! He asked why I had so long avoided him ? why I had not walked on this path that day two months ago, when I knew that I should meet him ? He asked why I had grown deaf and blind, so that I neither heard nor saw him coming through the wood ? And then he asked what sorrow was this which appeared to fill my whole heart, making me look so changed and sad ? He paused for an answer ; yet I spoke not. I trembled so that I could hardly stand, but gave no other sign of life.

He did not quickly speak again. A throbbing silence seemed to fall between us.

At length he spoke once more. And now I thought that I was mad indeed ! And I wrenched my hand from his, fearing some cruel, mocking spirit of my own imagination had taken David's shape, and was speaking words of rapture to me, whose illusion I should wake from to find they were unreal—words that David Scott never, never would say to me !

I could not, I dared not, believe what I seemed to hear. But I heard those same words again. I raised my head, and gazed at David with unshrouded eyes, and I saw him look kindly at me, and then I heard him say, "How often must I tell you of my love ? Can you not believe in love, or in my words ? Listen, listen, and again I will tell you that I love you !"

He loved me ! I had then heard aright ? It was then true he loved me ? He could then find it in his heart to love me ? Oh agony of joy !

I fell upon my knees at David's feet, and sobbing, cried, "You have killed me, you have killed me with joy !"

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DAVID and I were not married without difficulty. When Aunt Jane heard I intended to marry David Scott, she was grievously offended and much shocked. Her transitions, from silent huffiness to indignant lamentation, and from lamentation to tears, were very puzzling. My aunt grieved, and amused, and astounded me, and all at once ! She wept a good deal, yet I saw she not only cried, because she liked to cry, but also because, for some reason or other, she thought it right and proper to shed tears. As to poor David, she utterly confounded him ! He made her a very kind little speech on meeting her for the first time after I had announced his proposal, and asked her consent to our marriage, and begged her blessing. I had told him on no account to forget the blessing, and I confess that I had expected the pleasure of blessing David would have instantly shortened my aunt's upper lip ; instead of which, down, down, down came that lip !

"Yes, indeed, Mr Scott," said Aunt Jane, in the voice of an ill-used woman ; "I know you proposed to Sophy, because Sophy told me you did, and I was so much shocked when I heard it, that Snipkins says I have never been well since, and certainly I was quite horrified, because . . ."

"Horrified ? . . ." exclaimed David ; but he found my aunt was talking on, and not listening to him in the slightest degree. Aunt Jane was in full sail, and he had yet to learn that any attempt at interruption has only the effect of making her repeat her last words over again, so as to recover weight for the next sentence. She was saying—"I was quite horrified, because when you proposed to Sophy she ought not to have given you any answer . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook . . ."

"Any answer for at least a week, for Sophy ought to have taken at least a week or ten days, or even a fortnight, to consider whether by trying with all her might she possibly could love you . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook! I implore . . ."

"Whether she could ever love you in her whole life . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook! Mrs Sherbrook . . ."

"Yes, she ought to have thought for a very long time, if she ever could love you at all, because it really looks now as if Sophy thought she liked you before you ever proposed to her . . ."

"Aunt Jane!" cried I.

"Be quiet, Sophy!" said my aunt; "it really does look, Mr Scott, as if Sophy thought she liked you before ever you proposed to her, and that is a very shocking and very dreadful thing, because no nice young lady should ever think she likes a gentleman until he has proposed for her to her relations."

David looked at me and smiled. Aunt Jane saw him smile, so the lip which had been going up a little from the pleasure of talking, came down again as far as it could come, and that is a pretty long way!

"Mr Scott," said my aunt, "a gentleman"—she laid marked emphasis on the word,—"a gentleman should first propose to a lady's nearest relations, and if they approve, then he may propose to the lady herself."

"But really, Mrs Sherbrook . . ." began David.

My aunt was not yet out of breath—"Though, Mr Scott," she continued, "I do not think Edward and I would have accepted you for Sophy, if Sophy had not first accepted you herself, because we both think that, unfortunately, you are not a bit suited to her . . ."

"Aunt Jane!" cried I.

"No, Sophy, not a bit suited! because you want a very sensible husband indeed, and a man of sound and serious views, who would always be trying to correct your faults."

"Oh! but, Aunt Jane!" I exclaimed, "I should hate to marry a man who would be occupied through life in correcting my faults! It is my faults want a lover, and not my virtues!"

"You may argue if you like, Sophy," replied my aunt; "you always do argue! but I know exactly the sort of person you ought to marry, if ever you marry at all, though I think you are quite unsuited to marry any one, or to have a house of your own, as you are not at all clever, and never do anything

at regular hours ; but if you do insist on being obstinate and ungrateful, and marrying somebody and going away from your uncle and me, you ought at least to wait some years till you are old enough to know your own mind, and then I should know beforehand you intended to marry, and I might therefore be the means, under Providence, of making you marry some one who would have your highest interest at heart,—some truly Christian gentleman who . . .”

David had abandoned the forlorn hope of being able to interrupt Aunt Jane. I was in a perfect fever, for I did not know what she might say next, or how long she might be saying it, and I saw she would make David think her an intolerable bore, and this grieved me, because I knew how he hated a bore, and I did not want him to dislike poor Aunt Jane. Yet for all this, the scene was diverting, as David had expected some little compliment in return for his polite speech.

Aunt Jane was running on about the Christian gentleman, and telling us what she would think it her duty to say if such a man proposed to her in future years for Sophy, when the door opened and in hobbled Mrs Stewart. She seized the situation by instinct. “My dear Mrs Sherbrook,” she instantly exclaimed, “that bandage has got twisted on my ankle, and no one can settle it but you ! You have spoilt me, my dear Mrs Sherbrook !” Aunt Jane flew to her poor, dear cripple, and eagerly offered her arm, and in half a minute she was safe away bandaging her Catherine in another room. Mrs Stewart was not against our marriage.

For a moment David stood speechless, as if Aunt Jane’s words were still flowing in his ear, then burst into fit upon fit of laughter. I was delighted to hear him laugh, as I had feared he might consider Aunt Jane a serious and not an amusing bore. “The idea of my proposing first to her !” cried he ; “it is the finest idea ever invented !” This notion amused him more than anything else my aunt had said. He laughed over it as if it were an inexhaustible comedy to his imagination.

“ Well, really, David,” said I, trying to excuse Aunt Jane, and make her seem a little more sensible than she appeared—“ I believe it was the fashion in Aunt Jane’s youth for a gentleman to go through several stages of propriety and proposal, paying his addresses through surrounding relations, until, at last, he came to the lady herself: like a giraffe, he went stretching and stretching his neck till he touched the green leaf of his hopes.”

"Sophy," replied David, "the world has changed since Mrs Sherbrook's youth."

"But not to her, David! The world never changes to people like Aunt Jane and Uncle Sherbrook."

After a moment's silence, David said to me gravely—"Sophy, forgive me if I seem too curious or unkind, and tell me the real truth just as if we were man and wife, and I were not asking an impertinent question. Is your aunt . . . what is called *wanting*? deficient, I mean, . . . or . . . or . . . decidedly imbecile?"

"Oh dear, no!" cried I; "nothing at all decided about her anyway! It is quite undecided still whether she has an intellect or not. Most people think she has; she thinks so herself; and indeed she is generally spoken of as a most sensible, estimable person. Aunt Jane looks so wise that if she would only talk less, I am sure half the world would think her clever, but unluckily for her reputation, she was wound up at the creation, and has never thoroughly unwound herself yet. Oh, my dear David! there are hundreds, there are thousands of women in the world like Aunt Jane! Some talk as much, and some talk less; seen from a distance, some are considered very wise and some a little wise; but to all such as intimately know them, their mind gives despair! Yet they pass muster perfectly in life."

David agreed with me in thinking there are hundreds of women who have minds much on a pattern with Aunt Jane's. He said, "Now there is my Aunt Arabella; she is very kind, but decidedly not brilliant. However, Sophy," he added, "I think she is cleverer than your Aunt Jane."

"Certainly, David!" I exclaimed—"certainly! Her mind is better knit together. Lady Arabella intermarries her friends with but little confusion, while Aunt Jane is quite capable of marrying a lady to every gentleman in the United Kingdom except her own husband, particularly if the lady is of Scotch extraction."

David laughed at this, and said, "Ah! indeed, Miss Sophy, however my Aunt Arabella may marry people in theory, believe me she thinks herself remarkably clever at marrying her neighbours in practice. She is very proud of our match!"

"Nonsense, David!" I retorted angrily—"nonsense! She likes the reputation of match-making, but we made our own match. She had nothing on earth to say to it!"

The delusion that David and I had not fallen in love unaided, which seemed to have taken possession of everybody I knew, except Aunt Jane, annoyed me more than I can tell.

On returning to the Abbey from town, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone called to pay a duty visit, and also to congratulate my aunt and me. I was not in the room when she arrived, but I entered it as she was leaving. This is how Jumping Georgy congratulated me,—“Not at all surprised, Sophy!” said she; “Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart is a very clever woman—very! and Lady Arabella is no bad hand at that sort of thing! saw it all at Mineham! but Louisa was in the way then; glad to say she is out of it now!”

“*Thankee!*” said I; and I considered *Thankee!* exactly what such a speech deserved.

It provoked me to find Uncle Sherbrook was even more convinced than any one else that I had been entrapped into marrying, and that it was quite impossible I could be in love with David; but I was touched when I discovered that much of his disbelief in my affection for David came from his believing in the affection I felt for him. “I did not think you would leave me, Sophy, as I imagined you were perfectly happy and contented in my house, and therefore I thought you would remain with me until my dissolution. You would not have had to wait long, child, as I have passed the threescore years and ten allotted to man on earth.” He said these words sadly, almost tenderly; they grieved me, and made me remember how I had vowed to stand beside my uncle in his old age, and to be a strong-hearted friend to him. I recalled this oft-repeated vow of mine with a pang very like remorse. I had forgotten it! I had forgotten everything in my love for David Scott.

I had the greatest difficulty in gaining Uncle Sherbrook’s consent to my marriage. He called David a “penniless adventurer, who will want settlements made on him, but can’t settle a penny himself,” and declared Mrs Stewart had made up the match for me. “Do not contradict me, Sophy; I will not hear a word in her favour.” And then my uncle did indeed surprise me! He gave utterance to the most astounding sentiments; he was guilty of sacrilege against the best of women. He called her a busybody, an intriguer, a match-maker! He wished to Heaven she had not sprained her ankle, and declared that now she had come to stay in his house, he foresaw she would never go away again. He wondered why she could not live in Scotland with her husband’s relations. In short, Uncle Sherbrook was not only guilty of sacrilege, but of high treason. He amazed me! And amused me too—yet not for long. My heart grieved for the old man. I saw he was getting to hate the saint who clearly intended to live in his house, and I pitied him, because I knew he would never be able to get rid of her.

I knew he would put off the battle from day to day till it was too late. It is not easy to quarrel with the woman who rules your own wife ; besides, Uncle Sherbrook was not what he used to be : the lion could still roar, but he had lost his back teeth.

When at last I did manage to coax a grudging, unwilling sort of consent from my uncle, his only consolation seemed to be that he and Mr Jones could "*tie up*" all my money on myself in such a manner that David could not touch a penny of it.

"Sophy," said Uncle Sherbrook with fierce determination,— "Sophy, every single penny shall be tied up on you. Jones and I will tie it up. *He* shall not be able to touch a sixpence without your consent."

My uncle frightened me. "Poor David!" said I ; "he is not my mortal enemy ! and you speak as if he were my enemy and a thief."

"Sophy," replied my uncle, sternly, "you may trust me to do what is best for your interest." And then his manner softened, and he said, with a look of grave pleasure, "You have trusted me now for fully three years, and have never once questioned or doubted me. You have signed every document I laid before you, and when I have asked if you desired to read the contents of a paper, you have trusted me, and you have signed the deed, and have not read it." To my great surprise his voice betrayed emotion. He again repeated, "You have trusted me," and paused. "Sophy," he continued, "Sophy, . . . you . . . you are richer than you think."

Uncle Sherbrook told me the £800 a-year left under my father's will to my mother for life, and then to me, had increased to considerably over £2000 a-year. It seems my property consists of some land in the north of England, a part of which lies in the manufacturing districts. There is one field in particular bringing me in £900 a-year, my uncle having leased it to a neighbouring coal-mine. "What luck!" cried I. As far as I could judge, this field is the luckiest bit of my property ; but the rest, my uncle explained to me, is fast rising in value.

I was enchanted to find I was richer than I thought. I thanked my uncle vehemently. I could not thank him half enough. I threw my arms round his neck, and actually embraced him in my excess of joy. He did not push me from him. He let me kiss him twice, and thank him many times. Too sudden a rush of amiability into the constitution, thought I, is a bad sign of a man's health.

I should have been alarmed by the change in my uncle, had he not all of a sudden returned to his old voice and manner.

“Sophy,” he remarked, severely, “your marriage shall make no difference in the management of your affairs, as I will continue to manage your property for you all the same.” I did not know what to say to this, so I said nothing. Uncle Sherbrook, looking almost ferocious, again repeated what he had said before: “Every penny shall be tied up on you. That fellow shall not be able to touch a farthing of your property. Jones and I will tie it up.”

I was delighted beyond measure to think I had two thousand a-year. Two thousand a-year! I thought that greater riches than it is. Two thousand a-year! Why, David only wanted money to do great things in life, and I had money to give him now.

“Davie, Davie,” said I, “I am so rich! I am quite a lady of fortune! I have more than £2000 a-year! Only think—more than two thousand a-year!” David scanned me with a quick, searching glance, and looked as if there was some word which craved to be spoken lying on the very tip of his tongue. “What is it, David?” I asked, thus answering the expression of his eloquent face. He reddened. He hesitated, as if he could not give utterance to what he fain would say. He looked away, and then looked at me again, and said in a low voice, almost like the voice of shame, “Is this, then, a surprise to you, Sophy?” The idea that Uncle Sherbrook may have said something to him about settlements, something reproachful and indelicate, rushed across my mind, and seemed to explain David’s evident embarrassment. I blushed more deeply than he, feeling that money matters, like copper coin in a satin purse, soil the rich beauty of love.

“Davie,” I said, “you and I will have money enough between us. We are both richer than we thought, so we will live in England, and never, never think of those dreadful colonies again. By the by,” cried I, with sudden recollection, “how was it I met you that day on the hill at the very hour when Mrs Stewart told me you were sailing from Sheerness? I have forgotten to ask you, and oh; it is such a mystery to me!”

“Where was I sailing from?” inquired David.

“Sheerness.”

“And where was I going to?”

“David, are you mad?”

“By Jove! never was saner in my life. Where was I going to, Sophy?”

“New Zealand.”

“Well done, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart!” he exclaimed, laugh-

ing heartily ; "and I never thought of going anywhere but to Scotland for the Twelfth, and that only if you did not accept me. Well done, Mrs Stewart ! No wonder that clever lady converts people by the dozen ! for when they know her they must be afraid to go to hell with her ! She will make too much mischief there."

David then told me how disappointed and angry he had been not to see me that day when he called at Sherbrook Hall immediately after luncheon. "And we came by Mrs Stewart's special appointment," said he. "I drove *tête-à-tête* with Aunt Arabella on purpose to meet you, and speak to you, and propose to you, if I could ; and I was horribly bored those nine long miles." He said Mrs Stewart quickly perceived he was annoyed at not seeing me, and declared I had heard the carriage coming along the avenue, and had disappeared on purpose ; "but no sooner did she put me in a passion with you, Sophy, than she calmed me by saying that I must indeed have very little experience of life if I did not know what sort of feeling it was which made a woman fear to meet a man."

I winced at these words, but said nothing.

"I understood her," said David ; "she saw I understood her : so when I was leaving she whispered if I would walk on the path over the hill the following afternoon, you would surely be there to meet me. And you were there, Sophy." He took my hand—"You were there."

"Yet would to God," I said, "we had not owed our happiness to lying tricks !"

But David did not share my indignation against Catherine Stewart. He said he could not be angry with such a useful person—"for, Sophy, what with your Aunt Jane's tears and your Uncle Sherbrook's conviction that you are marrying against your will, we should never get married if Mrs Stewart were not determined on the match. The admirable Catherine, as you call her, is anxious to get rid of you. I daresay you are often in her way when she is humbugging your Aunt Jane. She will not object to our speedy wedding, I can tell you."

I could not forgive Mrs Stewart then and there, as David did. Yet I soon forgot not to forgive her. Indeed, to tell the truth, strange as it may seem, I soon felt more charitably disposed towards her than I had ever done in my life, simply because my own great happiness made me feel kindly disposed towards every human being. Our own joy will idealise the whole world. I could find no room for hatred in my heart. It is longing disappointment craving in vain for a love that can

satisfy, which gives the empty place to bitterness and unfor-giving indignation. Nothing makes us so charitable as our own happiness. Not that the charity of the happy heart is a virtue to be praised. I felt it was only an instinct, and nothing more.

However, it was not very long before my charity towards the admirable Catherine began to cool—the cause of our renewed enmity being the choice of the clergyman who should marry me. Mrs Stewart was determined I should be married by Mr Thunderbore, while I declared war in favour of the Reverend James.

I was firmly resolved to be married by the Rector of the parish, or else, I had told Mrs Stewart, not to be married at all. I gave David my reasons for this, and he thought them good ones. He entered all the more easily into my views, because he disliked Mr Thunderbore's *type and antetype* sermons, and feared this great light might discourse at the altar on the "types and antetypes" of marriage, drawing endless comparisons from Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, the Christian Church, and the golden vessels of the Tabernacle. And David well knew, when Mr Thunderbore began to talk of the golden vessels of the Tabernacle, that only a miracle could stop him. We had once heard him preach for an hour and ten minutes on the text, "And the tongs thereof and the snuff dishes thereof shall be of pure gold." In this simple commandment, Mr Thunderbore had discovered an *antetype* (whatever that may be) of the millennium, and a type of our Lord's first coming, besides symbols of the narrow tenets of the Jewish faith, of the broader dogmas of Christianity, and types of the sect-like nature of the Levitical priesthood under the old dispensation, and of the free, open character of the clergy of the Church of England under the new one.

As David and I were both obstinately determined to be married by the Reverend James, I carried the disputed point into the study, and appealed to Uncle Sherbrook. I was glad to find my wish to be married by the Rector pleased him, and moreover relieved him of a serious apprehension. He commended me for the wish, told me to be firm, and said it would be an insult to the Rector of the parish if I were married by Mr Thunderbore in Harefield Church,—"And more especially when you are married from my house, Sophy. It is by no means my desire that James should be insulted."

I saw the clannish Scotch blood again ran unchecked in my uncle's veins, and that to him his relations were always his

relations, and never strangers. No matter what they might do, or what my uncle might be made to think of them, they had the right divine to be recognised as kinsmen before all the world.

With but little persuasion I induced Uncle Sherbrook to come with me to the rectory, and himself ask his cousin to perform the ceremony. My uncle's head was so full of settlements that he had not perception for anything else; and I thought I could trust him not to see the M.B. waistcoat or the long-flapped Ritualistic coat.

James Sherbrook received us with much tact and courtesy, and behaved like the kind, good man he really is. My uncle's manner changed, and he became very kind to his cousin, and not overmuch imperious. He asked to see Mary, and solemnly invited her to the wedding, and even graciously extended the invitation to the two eldest boys and the two eldest girls.

There was high wrath when the admirable Catherine found peace had been concluded without her sanction between the rectory and the Hall. The best of women dared not fight openly with Uncle Sherbrook, and Aunt Jane was the wretched substitute she had to put forward in her stead. Before long my uncle overawed my aunt by saying, "Jane, I have asked James to perform the sacred ceremony; and I have invited Mary and the four eldest children to the wedding. What is done, Jane, cannot be undone." These words invariably silenced Aunt Jane.

Mrs Stewart ventured a remark: "Quite right, Mr Sherbrook—quite right. It is far too late to alter matters now. Yet have you considered into what foolish and unnecessary expense you are leading Mary Sherbrook? Mary is always glad of an excuse to be extravagant, and buy new dresses."

Aunt Jane only sighed aloud, but Uncle Sherbrook said, "Thank you, Mrs Stewart, for reminding me of what I might otherwise have forgotten. Mary being my cousin's wife, should, I am aware, appear to advantage on a public occasion, and I shall take care she and the children have proper means placed at their disposal."

As my uncle was not a generous man in small things, such munificence on his part had never even been apprehended by Mrs Stewart. Her anger could not be concealed.

Uncle Sherbrook, being backed by me, was singularly firm and courageous. As for me, black looks were nothing to me now that I was in good spirits, and had a near escape at hand. My uncle also looked forward to finding a safe retreat in my new

home in case of some hardly-fought victory or defeat. This hope raised his courage. I told him I should have one small spare room ready for him in Montagu Square as soon as ever our honeymoon was over and our foreign tour ended,—“but I am sorry to say, Uncle Sherbrook, it is only a bachelor’s room.” There was something in my uncle’s manner of accepting the invitation which made me think he considered the smallness of the accommodation a positive attraction.

“That is of no consequence, Sophy,” he said—“of no consequence whatever. Pray, do not think of putting yourself out in any way in order to make room for your Aunt Jane: she will be perfectly happy at home entertaining her friend Mrs Stewart. Besides, Sophy,” he added, lowering his voice and glancing round the study as if Snipkins might have entered the room unawares, “the next time I can manage to go up to town without creating suspicion, I have very important business to transact.” He lowered his voice still more, and amazed me by “imparting to me in perfect confidence and secrecy,” as he termed it, the astonishing fact that he wished to get rid of Boggle! He informed me he had had some suspicions as to Mr Boggle’s uprightness and honesty for the last year. This being the case, I implored him not to lose an instant in dismissing the man. I told Uncle Sherbrook I deeply distrusted Mr Boggle, though I had no particular reason to give for my instinctive prejudice.

“Your aunt and Mrs Stewart,” he replied, “admire Boggle’s undoubted legal capacity. He has an extraordinary influence over them, and they are his violent partisans. They would give me no peace were I to declare my intention of dismissing him. I will therefore wait, Sophy, until I can do so quietly, and away from them both. The matter once finally settled, I will tell your aunt what is done cannot be undone. That is the one argument she readily grasps.”

My uncle’s procrastination about dismissing Mr Boggle alarmed me, because I was sure he must have very good reason to think the attorney a rogue, or the notion of sending him away could never have entered his head. Neither Aunt Jane, nor Mrs Stewart, nor Snipkins, had questioned the soundness of Mr Boggle’s doctrine. However, I found that no amount of persuasion would make Uncle Sherbrook dismiss his attorney until he should find himself at a safe distance from his own home; so I gave up the task in despair. The mixture of determination and weakness in my uncle’s character puzzled me. The cowardice had grown upon him, and I feared it must be a

sign of age ;—not that I had much time to think over the psychology (as books call it) of the fact, for my imagination was just now full of a subject more engrossing than the peculiarities of near relations. My wedding-day grew nearer and nearer.

At last it came, and then, thank heaven ! it was over.

I must allow that, on the whole, David and I were married more easily than I had dared to expect. Mrs Stewart had managed to put Aunt Jane into a good humour. She had advised her to place the following request for prayer in her pet religious newspaper. There was a particular corner kept in this little tract-like publication expressly for such advertisements. Aunt Jane showed me the paragraph, and shook her head and sighed, and seemed to feel real satisfaction. These were the exact words :—“A Christian lady, whose unawakened niece is going to marry a young gentleman of doubtful religious principles, asks the prayers of Christian parents, uncles, aunts, and guardians.”

We had merely a few near relations at our wedding—just the Sherbrooks, Lady Arabella, and the Rigardy-Wrenstones.

I know Rigardy-Wrenstone did grace our marriage by his presence, for I saw him and felt him doing the honours in church and at the breakfast with an easy condescension most flattering to us all, except, indeed, to Uncle Sherbrook, who would not be flattered by him, and who preferred doing the honours himself, especially in his own house.

So thoroughly and overpoweringly did Rigardy-Wrenstone do the honours in church, that to this day I am far from sure whether he or the Reverend James actually tied the sacred knot ; but I rather think it was Rigardy-Wrenstone.

CHAPTER XXXV.

We went to Paris for our honeymoon, and I was astounded to find there are still Roman Catholics in France ! I am well aware no Turk is a Mussulman and no black a heathen, but I had thought it equally certain no Frenchman was a Papist. I had fancied Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart had even converted the few infidels who, once upon a time, were straying about the country. I said I must write and tell Aunt Jane there were Roman Catholics in Paris. “She has not a notion of it, David ; for you

see, in the highly coloured reports her Catherine dresses up for the converting societies, France is a converted land, and Jules and Alphonse are as sound as Sambo."

David said he well knew what such reports were, for Mineham was strewn with them. He spoke with a severity amounting to hatred, of all "that sort of humbug," and declared he "abhorred the whole thing. And I believe," cried he, "the missionaries themselves are nothing but a pack of humbugs—a set of canting"

I put my hand upon his mouth and stopped the wicked sentence. "Oh, David," I said, "don't say such cruel, prejudiced words; it grieves me to the heart to hear them, for it pains me to think you should be unjust towards those noble men who, in sad exile from England, devote their life unselfishly to a holy cause."

"By Jove!" exclaimed David, jumping up: thrusting a hand into each trouser-pocket, he dived deeply therein, as if he were trying to get right down to the end of his surprise.—"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "Sophy, I don't understand you. I thought you hated Mrs Stewart's whole paraphernalia of charity—blacks, missionaries, and all!"

"Ah, Davie," I replied, "I should be glad to think you were the only person who would thus misunderstand me; but instinct tells me most people will do the same, and I am sorry for it! I am very sorry you think it is the missionary himself I dislike, when really I intensely honour and admire him. It is not the good man working for God in some unhealthy foreign hole, on the merest pittance of the money levied in our Lord's name, I dislike, but the flattered lady patroness at home; or still more, ten thousand times ten thousand more, do I hate the horde of pious harpies bothering, collecting, slightly peculating, and greatly intriguing!—those 'labourers worthy of their hire,' who debase charity into a vulgar trick for making desirable acquaintances; who don't care a straw for the poor missionary's real work, but who live their own small worldly life on the good fame of his holy one!"

"I hate the race!" said David, fervently. And I repeated, "I hate them! It does one good," I cried, "to bring out the hatred from one's heart, and declare it openly." And I said again, "I hate them!"

"Those canting busybodies," exclaimed David, "are sometimes of the male sex; but oftener, Sophy, they are fussers of the female kind."

I said I knew it. "They are women, David, to whom rank

and riches become a god, and to whom social advancement appears success in the kingdom of heaven ; for they sanctify their worldliness, their actions, and their flattery with the peculiar language, and make even lying seem only a very pious way of telling almost exactly, if not quite, the truth. It is such as they, David, who parody and exaggerate the enthusiastic missionary's reports, till they make the charities they beg for ridiculous."

"Worse than ridiculous," said David ; "for they make them disgusting with their canting twaddle."

To this I replied : "Well, David, you see they colour to please. Each lady patroness likes her own charity lauded, and her own particular sort of heathen turned into enlightened saints. So the pious toady glorifies Sambo into a state of moral and intellectual perfection which is simply absurd to those who know what the poor negro really is, and how low is the highest spiritual ideal ever reached by his Methody-banjo style of Christianity."

"As to those blacks," cried David, impatiently, "why, confound the blacks ! The blacks be d—d !"

I was not as much shocked by David's exclamation as I ought to have been, and I quickly forgave it, because I well knew my husband had very great excuse for swearing at Sambo. I knew he had been sickened with Sambo till he positively detested him ; so I merely said, "David, my dear, don't mind 'confounding' the blacks any more,—it is wicked ; and then it is waste of energy, for Sambo has had his day. He has only an odd admirer left him here and there, like your Aunt Arabella who loved him in her youth, and cannot forget him now. He is out of fashion, David—believe me, he is ! and the world has taken up quite another sort of savage, and a much more dangerous and ferocious one than Sambo ! Why, there is that Duchess of Wildfire, she will only collect for her Christian Cossack ; and I verily believe, no greater ruffian was ever turned into a saint. They say she is positively in love with him."

"Her Grace," said David, "can fall in love with any man except her own husband."

"Because," I retorted, "the duke is only an Englishman, and as yet unconvicted of crime."

Here the conversation dropped, so I took up my pen and wrote to Aunt Jane, and told her there were still a few Roman Catholics in Paris, and, I believed, a few more in the rest of France.

I did not get the quick answer which I had fully expected so wonderful a piece of news would draw forth. Indeed it was more than ten days before I heard from my aunt. I then received a letter, written in odd bits at six different times. Aunt Jane said she had been "so occupied with Catherine and with Edward that really, Sophy, I have not had a moment to myself;" and she added something about "poor dear Edward's" health, and Denis "teasing your uncle about those two oaks on the front avenue," and then the sentence broke off for that day, and never was taken up at the right place again. Trying to piece these odd bits in one's mind was much like taking a needle and trying to thread drops of water. The limp sentences written one day could not be strung to the limp ones written the next.

David would insist on reading this letter: he expected to be amused by Aunt Jane's surprise about the French Papists. He waded through the first sheet of note-paper well enough, but began shuffling the others backwards and forwards, declaring he must now draw lots as to which he would read next. "The whole affair," he exclaimed, "is a middle in a muddle, with neither beginning nor end! Your aunt drops down into the midst of a subject from the skies, and then with an *and* or a *because* drops down into the centre of another; but as she does not clear up a matter, she never quite leaves it, and twists backwards in her third page to the unfinished muddle of her first sentence. You never know where she is or who she is writing about." I must allow this was no bad description of the letter: having been written at stray moments, it was a very confused specimen of Aunt Jane's naturally involved style.

"I can't make out for the life of me," said David impatiently, scattering the loose sheets all over the floor, "if it is Snipkins who wet your uncle's shoes or he who wet Snipkins', or you who wet both their feet, for, Sophy, you are somehow mixed up in the matter, and in everything else besides. You are unsound, and so is James Sherbrook, and your uncle is bilious, and it is you encouraged *him* and Catherine who did not; but I defy any one on earth to say if the *him* stands for your uncle, James Sherbrook, or the benighted French Papist. The only clear point is that Catherine has been the means, under Providence, of discouraging them all, especially James Sherbrook and the French Papist. As to that French Papist, he roams about the letter, first wrapped in one text, and then in another: he crops up everywhere, and increases the confu-

sion tenfold. I could swear he even has a liver and wears a cold compress!"

"David," said I, "you exaggerate the confusion of my aunt's letter." Then truth forced me to add—"but not much, after all!"

Though the long rigmarole left no clear impression on my mind, it gave me, I could not exactly tell why, a feeling of general uneasiness about Uncle Sherbrook's health. There were more remarks than usual about wet feet and cold compresses, and Aunt Jane made them in different parts of the letter, as if "poor dear Edward's" ill health were a permanent idea flowing under and through all others. So I began to fear the internal Jesuit must be seriously upset. I went to the trouble of reading Aunt Jane's letter over again, and this time I paid particular attention to the sentence: "Denis has been teasing your uncle about those two oaks on the front avenue." I had not a notion what Aunt Jane could mean, but I guessed my cousin had invented some new way of annoying Uncle Sherbrook, and I was sorry to hear it.

In hopes of discovering if my uncle were really ill or well, I wrote to him myself, and the most concise and seriously sensible letter I could pen. I inquired particularly for his health, and begged him to consult Dr Daly if he did not feel well. I think my letter pleased Uncle Sherbrook, for I got an answer by return of post.

As a rule Englishwomen put the pith of a letter (if it has a pith) in the postscript, or at all events, well down in the fourth page; while Englishmen usually begin with the subject uppermost in their mind. Not because they wish to insure having plenty of room, for they never enlarge upon any matter: what they write, they write cautiously. A man who will talk openly and violently will write as if he expected you might bring an action for libel against him.

This was my uncle's letter:—

"DEAR SOPHY,—You may be unaware that the Wrenstone and Sherbrook estates are somewhat curiously intermixed. Your aunt's nephew holding a part of his kitchen-garden and the piece of land covered by his flower-garden, from me; while I am forced to rent a small portion of my own lawn and front avenue from him.

"Your aunt's nephew has lately cut down some of the trees on his land. The two old oaks beside the front avenue were

levelled to the ground early one morning, before there was time to apprise me of the trespass.

“I have taken the first opinion in London. Sir Wighead Pighead advises legal proceedings, and, moreover, says that I am entitled to heavy damages, the terms of my lease expressly annulling the landlord’s right to cut timber until such time as the lease shall expire.

“Were I a younger man, I might perhaps be tempted to file a bill against your aunt’s nephew, but I feel that at my time of life, the worry of such a lawsuit would be but a bad preparation for eternity. I cannot also refrain from reflecting that no lawsuit could make the old oaks grow again in my day.

“I have not had occasion to consult Dr Daly, my health being no worse than my age should lead me to expect. When threescore years and ten are past, the earthly pilgrimage is over.

“I am glad to hear a good account of you and your husband.—I remain, your affectionate uncle,

“E. BREWEN SHERBROOK.”

“Ah!” said I, when we had both read this letter, “Uncle Sherbrook is really ill. It is not the melancholy tone of the earthly pilgrimage and the threescore years and ten which makes me think so, for the earthly pilgrimage has been ending ever since I knew Uncle Sherbrook. That sort of gloom is no bad sign of him! it is only a necessary part of his correspondence, just like Aunt Jane’s mortal coil which is always wearing away even when she writes to order a new dress. But, David, I tell you what does frighten me in this letter,—it is the sudden death of the old pugnacious spirit. When a man like Uncle Sherbrook no longer jumps at a lawsuit, believe me there is something radically wrong about his constitution.”

I was very angry with Rigardy-Wrenstone, especially as the two trees he had cut down were the only good oaks at Sherbrook Hall—all the old timber there being beechwood, except the three elms on the back avenue. David was even more indignant than I was; a man who disapproves of another man’s conduct shows but little moderation in his wrath. My husband swore, “By Jove! there were not many English gentlemen like that fellow Rigardy-Wrenstone.” “And yet he is not such a bad fellow after all,” said I; “it is merely he never can manage to feel he is a great man except by making some one else feel little. He must have scope for his superfluous vanity, or it would fret his own flesh. They say, David, that rats gnaw incessantly, because otherwise their front teeth would grow too

big and worry their own mouth, and my cousin's vain conceit is just such a front tooth; it must have its mission in life! But do not let us talk any more of Denis," I cried, "or of the little world he worries! When I lived at Sherbrook with Rigardy-Wrenstone at the gate, and Aunt Jane indoors, I declare, David, I got to feel as if the world were no bigger than a threepenny bit! Don't let us talk any more of Denis, or of the admirable Catherine, or of Aunt Jane. Talk to me, David, of the larger world, where you have been, and of literature, politics, and the great questions of the day."

I liked to make David speak on such subjects, for when he spoke he seemed to open a wide doorway to my mind, so that my imagination left the prison where it had lain for years, and went out with David's into broader paths than I had ever known before. The change from the unsympathetic and deadly stupid sort of meandering all-about-nothing talk I had so long been bored with, to David's quick, clear, brilliant, and yet perfectly natural conversation, was simply intoxicating. I used to feel fearfully dull when I listened to Aunt Jane, and now I felt quite clever! And what excitement is there like the brightening delight of feeling quick and clever? Intelligence is a sort of champagne we can drink from the cup of another, and that is why the society of clever witty people is so enchanting: we drink from their glass, and feel lively like them. No doubt a really clever person would feel clever chained to a bore on a desert island; but a creature of my calibre depends for its liveliness on the brightness of others, and gets more or less identified with the mental nature of those it lives with: as a jockey, it becomes a part of its mount. When I jogged along slowly on Aunt Jane's mind I rode upon a cart-horse, and felt my body was heavy, my legs were thick, and my hoofs were shod with lumbering shoes; but, leaping on David's light thoughts, I and my racer were one.

I ran great risk of thinking I had married the cleverest man in Europe. My hitherto pent-up ambition revelled in the career I saw before him. And as to my imagination, it worked wonders; it became a kind of parliamentary whip to David, gaining him no end of supporters, and, if I must confess all,—why, it made him prime minister rather early in life. But I kept the little secrets of the inventing vagabond within me, quite to myself. I was determined never to let David think me a silly woman; I shrank with horror from the idea of becoming to him, in the slightest degree, what Aunt Jane was to Uncle Sherbrook. My pride and deep affection revolted from the bare

notion of such painful humiliation. I was aware, if silliness is to be admired and loved, she must come into the world with beauty as a dress, and even then must by no means outlive the fair raiment.

I knew I was ugly and sadly unattractive, and I had already perceived David was by nature a great admirer of beauty: you could not live with him and be blind to this fact. He had an eye for form and colour, and keen enjoyment of the beautiful in art,—that is, what seemed to him the beautiful. I was glad David had this taste, but I was not perhaps quite so well pleased to find that beauty in womankind was just as delightful an object of contemplation to him as beauty in art. Dear David was of so open and truthful a nature, that he concealed no thought from me. I took care not to snub him, but received all he said with sympathy, even when it happened to be something a little unsatisfactory. I could not forget how, once upon a time, he had said to me, “I can speak to you as if I were speaking to myself. I feel at my ease in speaking to you.” I hoped he might ever feel thus happily at ease with me, for it delighted me to think I was his pleasant companion, just as he was mine. Still, I was not married ten days before I began to wish with all my heart I could only be made over again. Not that I should have chosen to be remodelled after my own ideal of beauty, but rather after David’s, though what he most admired was only half beautiful to my eye. When we went to the Louvre, he would stand longer before a Greuze than a Raphael. There was one Greuze he particularly admired; I forgot if it was the head of a boy or a girl, for Greuze’s boys and girls are much alike.

“What do you think of that face, Sophy?” asked David one day.

“Why,” I said, “it is like Louisa Clarke,—all softness, and smiles, and floating blue eyes.”

David answered eagerly, “Yes, Sophy, it is like her. I am glad you see the likeness. It is very like—what she used to be.” And he gave me a glowing description of Louisa’s beauty when first he met her. “She was not clever, but she was a nice girl, Sophy, until she got into that fast, awfully-awful set, and was spoilt.”

“Yes, David,” I said, “I am sure she was nice, and I know she was pretty.” I drew my arm within his, and, gently clasping my two hands over his hand, “Davie dear,” I said, “shall we go and look at other pictures now, for we have stayed a long time gazing at this one?”

So he went with me into another room: but soon I missed him from my side, and retracing my steps, I returned to find him staring at that Greuze again. When he saw it was I who touched him, he smiled, and said, "So you have found and caught me, Sophy! Now that you have me, keep me fast and carry me home, or, by Jove! I will stand gazing here all night. Take me prisoner," cried he, playfully drawing my hand through his arm, "and drag me away. I am like a child when a thing catches my eye, and for the life of me I can't help looking at it."

What David thus said of himself, more in fun than earnest, I found to be quite true. Little by little, I perceived there was a wellnigh irresistible attraction for him in whatever excited his sympathy, either by sight or feeling. I should say that sympathy, in one form or another, is the chief trait in his character. It is his strength and his weakness. It makes an uncommon man of him, for quick sympathy is rare in Englishmen. It is this instinct within him which makes David so moving a speaker. When he cares to fascinate you, he does not talk to a theoretical myth or to posterity, but to your own particular mind and to your own living changing nature. You feel you are a distinct human being to him, and that as such, for the moment, you have a certain power over him.

I felt I made my own clear personal impression on him, and my vanity and heart alike were pleased. I hated being lost, like a grain of sand on a dusty road! I had been accustomed, ever since my mother's death, to feel I was really nothing and nobody; for after all, even to Uncle Sherbrook, I was only half a person. He was fond of me, and I of him; and I just fitted myself into his peculiarities, but he did not fit into mine. I was not a power within him, and I doubt if I were clearly an individual to him. I rather suspect he liked me because when I fitted into him he felt as if I were a bit of himself. But David has the sympathy which can imagine your personal existence, and he talks to you, and feels with you, and lives with you as if you were a distinct human being, and yet one whose heart and thoughts he can put in harmony with his. "Come, David," I would say, "and talk to me, and then I will feel I am myself. The novelty is delightful! It enchanteth me to find I am not really a bit of Uncle Sherbrook or Aunt Jane."

But it was not alone this new sense of equality which made me think marriage the happiest of all states; it was rather the right I found therein to love without reserve,—to ease my heart, and let the longing captive free. And then, if I loved

David, I knew he loved me too. I was sure he did, though perhaps not as much as I loved him. How could he love me as I loved him, when he was the attractive one, not I? From the first I knew my love was greater than his, so instinct warned me to give David's affection no shock, nor strain it overmuch until it had taken deep root in his heart. I was certain David could not think me as agreeable as I thought him. I had not read a book for the last three years, and hardly a newspaper, and I greatly feared he might find me dull if I took him away from the haunts of men and kept him strictly shut up all alone with myself for a whole month.

Mrs Stewart, Lady Arabella, Mary Sherbrook, Jumping Georgy,—nearly every one, in fact, even my aunt (though not my uncle), had taken it for granted we were to spend our honeymoon in Switzerland. Madame Julie Browne made me a dress expressly for the Alps.

We stopped in Paris on our way to those Alps, and I soon perceived David was in no hurry to proceed further. He told me he had "done" Switzerland twice over, and said he supposed we should have to "stick" in the valleys, as he thought ladies decidedly out of their element climbing the mountains. He seemed to think it would be considered quite a scandal were he to be seen on the top of Mont Blanc and I down in Chamouni. I pictured to myself David "sticking" with me in a mountain gorge during some three days' rain, and I was afraid at the sight I saw. I thought perhaps my husband's liveliness might fail, and he might fancy it was I who bored him, and not the rain.

It cost me a good deal to give up our Swiss tour, for I myself liked the idea of two kindred souls honeymooning in some lonely mountain *châlet* far away from the commonplace world. So I was sadly disappointed at first, but I took comfort in reflecting that, even under much more favourable circumstances than ours, too rigid a system of secluded honeymoon had not altogether proved a success. I recalled to mind that our first parents came to sorrow in Paradise, and I remembered how ungenerously Adam had accused Eve of having tempted him to sin, just as if he were a little tired of her. I therefore smothered the longings of romance, and firmly determined David should not be too strictly imprisoned in the Garden of Eden.

I encouraged him to stay on in Paris, as he liked the theatres, and was always meeting "fellows" he knew in the street. To please him, I would ask these friends to dine, and I would en-

courage them to propose David should take a "constitutional" with them next day; for the sort of double-quick "constitutional" one "fellow" takes with another seems necessary to an Englishman's happiness on the Continent, and it is the want of it which often depresses him in foreign lands. I was soon consoled for the loss of my Swiss trip by seeing David well amused and in good spirits. If ever he betrayed a tendency to yawn, or seemed in the slightest degree less lively than usual, I instantly sent him off to pick up a "fellow" and take a walk! He would return to me with a fresh mind, and sometimes even would enchant me by saying, "I am delighted to come back to you, Sophy! You are twice as pleasant as Jack Coventry!"

This compliment decidedly predisposed me in favour of Jack Coventry, and I was particularly glad when he met Jack, and did not meet a more agreeable man. Whenever Mr Coventry called, I asked him to dinner. Not that I cared for the man; he was too much of a polyglot foreigner for my taste, and was always abusing his own country. He spent the winters at Nice, and the summers everywhere except in England. David had met him some years ago abroad,—I rather think at Nice. I invited him pretty frequently.

Mr Coventry introduced David to a cousin of Sir Harry Hardup's, a certain "Tom Hardup," who, it appeared, had just lost his wife and buried her in Paris. Mr Coventry said this lady's illness and funeral had exhausted all "Tom Hardup's" circular notes, and that he was waiting in Paris for a remittance from his banker at home.

"*Et pour le moment*," said he, "as he owes a small bill to his landlord, the fool of a Frenchman keeps him a tight prisoner indoors. Awful bore for poor Tommy!"

"Awfully hard lines," exclaimed David; "he seems no end of a good fellow!"

"The circumstances of his case are certainly peculiar," said I. "I wonder if it would be kind, David, to lend him some money?"

"Better take care, Sophy! I say, Coventry, she had better take care, had not she?—and beware?"

David laughed, and Mr Coventry laughed too, and rather curiously, I thought. I could not see the joke; but then I had not the honour of Mr Hardup's acquaintance.

Shortly after this remark of David's, Mr Coventry bade us good-night. Whenever he dined with us he left early. He told us this evening, for the first time, why he never stayed later. He said that he and his friend, the Vicomte de Bélicose,

made a point of playing a quiet rubber every evening with the imprisoned widower Tom Hardup—*pour lui faire passer son temps, pauvre hère !* Like many naturalised English-Frenchmen, Mr Coventry shrugged his shoulders, and constantly said a whole sentence in French.

“Then,” said I, giddily, “I suppose as you are only three, the disconsolate widower plays dummy with the spirit of his late wife ?” But it appeared the late Mrs Hardup’s ghost never played whist,—on the contrary, Mr Coventry declared that trying to find a fourth hand each night was the very plague of his existence.

“Now that Harry Beauchamp is gone,” he said, “I am at my wits’ end to find a man who will play !—*C’était là mon renfort de potage !* Fellows generally go to the theatre when they are passing through Paris ; or else, Mrs Scott,” he added, turning to me, “they are on their honeymoon, and strictly imprisoned under severe discipline.”

I did not quite like this speech. “Mr Coventry,” I said, reproachfully, “a wife is not always the dragon you imagine. She does not invariably keep her husband under lock and key.”

Mr Coventry paid me some high-flown, polyglot compliment, and bowed himself out of the room like a born Frenchman.

No sooner was he gone, than David exclaimed in an excited manner, “What on earth possessed you to let Jack Coventry know you don’t keep a tight hand over me ? Hang it, Sophy, you have got me into a scrape !”

“A scrape ? Good gracious, David ! What scrape ?”

“Why, just this. Coventry and Hardup will be wanting me some night to make up a rubber of whist with them and their French viscount.”

I saw nothing dreadful in this. “But, David,” I answered, “I thought you liked whist ?”

“So I do—sixpenny points, and that sort of thing !”

“Ah ! I see,” said I, laughing ; “you born gambler ! You think poor Mr Hardup can only stake a halfpenny on the game ! So much the better for you all !”

“Halfpenny ?” repeated David, scornfully ; “half-poney, or a whole one, would be nearer the thing.”

When David explained to me what a “poney” meant, I understood his fears, and felt alarmed, especially as he said, “For all I know, this French viscount of theirs may be the greatest black-leg in Europe.”

“Surely,” I exclaimed—“surely Mr Hardup would never have a black-leg at his house !”

David only laughed. He astounded me; for he laughed as if he thought such a scandal quite possible.

"Why, David," said I, in utter amazement, "I heard you call Mr Hardup *no end of a good fellow?*"

"And so he is, Sophy; you may like a fellow well enough, but you may not altogether like his line. It is his line I don't like."

The distinction seemed a subtle one to me. "For heaven's sake!" I cried, "keep clear of him, David, and keep clear of Mr Coventry too!"

David answered in the tone of a man who is not only laying down the law for others, but also for himself. "Then we will leave Paris immediately!" I repeated the words, "Leave Paris immediately?" in a maze of astonishment.

"You see, Sophy," said David—"you see, if I meet Coventry, and he wants me to take a hand with him, Hardup, and the Vicomte, what the deuce . . . I beg pardon!—but what . . . What the deuce am I to say?"

"Say you won't play."

"All very fine, Sophy—all very fine! but if a fellow presses you, a man can't say that; and Coventry has a way of asking a favour which makes it hard lines to refuse. Confound it, Sophy!—if you had only been prudent to-night, I might have vowed you would blow me up sky high if I dared to touch a card!—and that is a first-rate excuse during a man's honeymoon! I have intended to say that all along; for Coventry has come very near the subject once or twice. He knows you are a sort of heiress, and now he will think you will pay if I lose. Hitherto I expect he feared you would leave me in the lurch, and cut me off to a shilling!"

"Abominable man!" cried I; "I will never ask him to dine again!"

David kept walking up and down the room in a state of irritable excitement, exclaiming, "Jack Coventry will think me a shirk! He will think me a coward if I don't play now, for I used to play at Nice when I had not your fortune to back me."

I asked with infinite contempt if it mattered to any one what Mr Coventry was pleased to think?

"But, Sophy," urged David, "when last we played, the luck was on my side; so you see Coventry will think I am bound in honour to give him the chance of retrieving former losses."

David and I had a regular argument on the subject. It provoked me to see what a slave he was to the opinion—even to the imaginary opinion—of this man; so I ended everything I

said with the words, "After all, it does not matter what Mr Coventry may think. That is the real point. Mr Coventry's thoughts are of no importance. Mr Coventry is an utterly insignificant being."

When I had repeated this two or three times, David seemed to agree with me; but I fancied he did not do so very heartily—so I began to think that perhaps we seriously had better leave Paris next day. At first, so extreme a measure had seemed an outrageously big precaution to take against the smallest possible bit of temptation,—I had even thought it ludicrous, and had laughed at the idea. But now I was changing my opinion. I said to my husband, "So it is settled we leave Paris to-morrow. David, you are right to go, and I am ready."

Instead, however, of the ready assent I expected, I was surprised to hear David grumble something about the "bore of sticking in rainy valleys!"—in short, I saw he had altered his mind, and was hunting his brain to find some good reason for it.

"Sophy, I have it!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "I knew there was some particular reason to prevent us from starting to-morrow!—but I could not just think of it for the moment. It is the letter you are expecting! Don't you remember? The letter you are expecting from Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart? Why, don't you recollect telling me, Sophy, you had written to her saying we should wait on her here till you got her answer, so as to be near home if she gave a bad account of your uncle?"

I said, "But, David, we need not go far away, and the letter can easily be sent after us."

However, David was certain the letter would be misdirected and lost. He waxed eloquent on the subject. The fact is, he had caught the small plank by which he wished to be saved: he wanted to stay on in Paris, and he had found an excuse.

David amused me.

It was quite true I did expect a letter from Mrs Stewart. Indeed, I was watching for it rather anxiously; because, not being able to make out if Uncle Sherbrook were or were not ill, I had written to Mrs Stewart, asking the question point-blank. As to Aunt Jane, I could not imagine what had happened to her, for I had never received but the one rigmarole from her—yet I had written to her three times, begging she would send me one line in return, just to say how my uncle was. I even asked her to say nothing else, thinking perhaps I might thus secure some kind of unmixed answer.

It was only as a last resource that I had written to Mrs Stewart. There was no one else I could write to, for I was certain none of the rectory people were allowed to see anything of my uncle.

Now, as I had not at all liked beginning a correspondence with the best of women, I had kept a pen in my hand for a day or two. While thus hesitating about writing my letter, it happened that one of the many "fellows" David met rushing through Paris was an officer in Gordon-Sherbrook's regiment. This Major Brown told David, Captain Stewart was dying. So David had said to me—

"Sophy, write instantly, and tell your admirable Catherine what Brown has told me. She might be enticed out to Malta."

"Not she! She is in too good quarters at home, and has been working too many years to get into them! Besides, David, you do not understand Gordon-Sherbrook's lungs. They are the oddest pair of lungs ever invented! There are two sides to each of them—a good and a bad one; so that Mrs Stewart can take whatever view of their health best suits her little plans."

David declared it was simply impossible for Gordon-Sherbrook any longer to have two sides to a lung. "Even his mother will have to allow the poor fellow has only one, and that a bad one. Why, Brown tells me poor Stewart has broken no end of blood-vessels; he says he is in the last stage of consumption, and that he has got three months' leave merely to die in. They dare not even move him from Malta, pestilential as the place is at this time of year." And David said he could not believe Mrs Stewart knew the real state of the case.

"Well, then," I replied, "if the poor young man really is dying, it might not be kind to tell his mother. She would tatt over his deathbed, and would cheerfully drive him into convulsions."

But David said charity began at home, and that I ought to consider what a blessed riddance Mrs Stewart would be to my unfortunate uncle if she would only take herself off to Malta.

"It is she, Sophy, who is disagreeing with his constitution; for I have noticed the very tone of her voice annoys him."

So I had dipped my pen into the ink, and had written to Mrs Stewart. I began with Uncle Sherbrook's health, as that was the real subject of my letter, and I wanted it to be also the subject of her answer. I merely touched on Gordon-Sherbrook's lungs in passing from inquiries about Uncle Sherbrook to inquiries about Aunt Jane. I told Mrs Stewart exactly what

Major Brown had said to David, for I knew she was not a woman whose maternal feelings I need dread to shock.

I got Mrs Stewart's answer one evening as we came out from the *table d'hôte*, just three days after David had proposed leaving Paris. It was he brought me the letter himself, and in a sort of triumph. "At last, Sophy!" cried he—"at last! here is the tiresome letter we have been waiting for." I perceived David had come to think he had waited on for the letter, and for no other reason. "When you have read it," he said, "you can tell me the news;" and he ran away to have a chat in the smoking-room. I laughed to see him run away so quickly, because I knew he feared I might read him my admirable Catherine's letter—or worse, make him read it to me; and he had already got such a sickening of my correspondence, that he used to declare I had killed the germ of curiosity within him by one judicious dose of Aunt Jane.

I laughed all the more, as I considered David had been scared away without due cause. I expected the very shortest of replies from Mrs Stewart, or I should not have felt so merry, for I heartily dislike Scriptural rigmaroles! It was only natural I should think the letter would be quite to the point, and with neither a *D.V.* nor *D.G.* beyond, because the best of women never fancied it was necessary to sanctify her language when talking to me, as she did when speaking to Aunt Jane. I therefore expected her to write to me as she spoke. Imagine then my surprise on finding the envelope contained a large sheet of foreign note-paper, quite filled, and even partly crossed.

I perceive, said I, scanning the letter closely, that Gordon-Sherbrook has still two sides to each lung, and a *D.V.* and a *D.G.* and a text of Scripture to each side as well. When I came to read the maternal effusion, I found, instead of overstating the case, I had actually understated it. Gordon-Sherbrook, I said, correcting myself, has not two, but six sides to each lung—a dozen between the two lungs; and a *D.V.* and a *D.G.* and a text of Scripture to each one of the twelve sides. At any rate, cried I, trying to draw some sort of conclusion from the rigmarole—at any rate, I gather that his mother declares the bad sides are corrected by the good, so she does not think him dying, and certainly will not go to Malta. The intention of not going to Malta is quite clear; in fact, strange to say, it was the only clear part of the whole effusion, and this was strange, because Mrs Stewart had not a confused mind. To my great annoyance, Uncle Sherbrook was forgotten altogether! Not a word about him from beginning to end.

Provoking woman ! I exclaimed. However, my uncle cannot be ill. She would say so if he were. That certainty set me at ease.

I crumpled up the letter, and thought how much I disliked Mrs Stewart. I went to meet David, feeling I loved him the more, for not loving all the world besides.

The waiter, whom I sent into the smoking-room, brought me word David had never been there. Another *garçon* remembered seeing "monsieur" meet in the courtyard *ce gros monsieur anglais qui dîne parfois avec madame*, and then go out into the street with him. The waiter could not tell me the *gros monsieur's* name, but when I suggested "Coventry," he instantly replied, "*C'est bien ça, madame !*"

I expected no other reply ; and yet the ready answer was a shock to me. I saw what had taken place. I dreaded what might happen. I went up to our little *salon* with a heart full of anxious foreboding, and I waited for David. I waited one hour. I waited two. I waited three—when I no longer feared, but knew what had occurred.

David did not come home till after midnight. I sent the maid to bed, and opened the door for him myself. When he saw me, he looked as if he would rather see any one on earth but me. He stood on the threshold, as if it required a courage he had not, to walk in.

"I will call for it early to-morrow, Scott, not now," whispered a voice in the dark, behind David, which I recognised as Mr Coventry's.

"No, no, Mr Coventry," said I, bitterly ; "tell me what David has lost to you this night, and he shall pay it now. Walk in, Mr Coventry, walk in to the light. I hope David has lost more money to you than you ever gained from him ?" In saying these words, I fear contemptuous scorn marked my voice too strongly for good manners ; but I despised, I almost hated the man who had tempted my husband to gamble. And it was through my poor David's too chivalrous sense of honour, thought I, that this man led him to play against his will.

I hardly blamed David, or if I did blame his weakness, when I looked at him I forgot to do so any longer. He had sunk upon a chair the very picture of distress, and, I might say, of shame. My heart yearned towards him, and my fast rising anger turned from him to fix entirely on Mr Coventry : there was an air of impudent triumph about this man's whole look and manner, which I resented as an insult to David's misery.

I longed to be rid of Mr Coventry's presence. I begged

David to name the sum—I knew he had lost; but David stared blankly before him, and gave no answer. It was the unblushing “Jack” himself who walked jauntily forward, and said the lost stakes amounted to £500.

We had nothing like that sum with us. So I stood for the moment bewildered and speechless, knowing we never could get the money without applying to Uncle Sherbrook, for he was still my agent, manager, banker—everything! and I hated being driven to betray my husband’s weakness to him.

David gave me no help: he sat immovable, gazing vacantly.

“*Ne vous dérangez pas, madame!*” said Mr Coventry, politely; “*le jeu change.* To-morrow Scott may win back more than he has lost.” David looked up at these words. I saw a flash of hope in his awakening eye, and I shuddered with fear, and loathed the man who was tempting him. Mr Coventry seeing his advantage, pursued it, and gave many instances of men who, ruined one day, ruined others the next. He then addressed himself more particularly to me, and paid me a whole string of compliments, drawing nearer with each compliment. He ended by saying there was no hurry whatever about the payment of the “little debt;” he said he confided it to my honour, “*et l’honneur d’une dame ne fait jamais banqueroute.*” Having thus turned off his last sentence in French, he bowed like a fop on the stage, who intends kissing a lady’s hand. As he approached, I stepped back, and stood beside David.

When I moved, the light of the candles caught the large diamond ring I always wore on my right hand. I noticed my ring; I hesitated to part with it, for it was my mother’s, and I had worn it ever since her death. But the longing to get rid of David’s tempter grew stronger in my heart than any other feeling, so I held up my hand, and touching the ring, I cried, “Here is something worth more than £500!”

Mr Coventry knew the ring right well. He had often observed the diamond, and spoken to me of its great value; I was sure he would take the ring for the debt. Yet again I hesitated.

David, seeing the diamond flash so near him, suddenly seized my upheld hand, exclaiming, “With this to stake, Sophy, I would win the £500 back again!” That demon, the gambler’s hope, started like a bright light into his eye, and illuminated all his face.

Terrified, I wrenching away my hand, and took off the ring without another qualm. I gave it to Mr Coventry, who accepted it eagerly enough.

"Scott," said he, "you must redeem this to-morrow. I only keep it *en attendant*, to please a lady." And then with some compliment to me about the hand which the diamond so long had graced, he bowed himself out of the room. He took quick leave.

"I will redeem it for you!" cried David, springing up; "I will redeem it, Sophy, or play till doomsday!"

The gambling fever slept itself away in the night, and, to my joy, David awoke another man next day. The glamour of excitement faded, and he saw things as they were, and himself as he had been; so he consented to leave Paris by a morning train, and left it with no bad grace! Indeed his good humour delighted and surprised me, because I saw he was really sorry for the scrape into which he had fallen, and I knew self-reproach makes most people, especially men, decidedly cranky. I could fancy Uncle Sherbrook biliously returning from vice to virtue. But David seemed to have the art of repenting without being cross. David repented agreeably. Never did a man repent so pleasantly as he!

It is true I never alluded to Mr Coventry, except once, and then only to say, "David, from the first I suspected that man dyed his moustache, but now I am sure of it!" I was thus careful not to improve the occasion, because much experience had taught me how irritating and generally useless are "words in season."

I excused David's fault by ascribing his easy yielding to that inborn sympathy of his—that sympathy which was what I most loved in him, that pleasant, unforbidding virtue, so different from the stiff, punctual ones I hitherto had known.

Though I became convinced it was this virtue, coupled with his over-sensitive feeling of honour, which had led him astray, I cannot now exactly remember how I arrived at this conclusion. I find our pleasant journey from Paris has left no trace of ponderous reasoning in my mind; indeed, at this distance of time, my memory alone recalls to me that David's voice was in my heart those happy days, and he beside me.

Never had he been kinder, never so kind before! and in travelling there are many little ways of showing thoughtful affection. David's tenderness (I can call it by no other name) filled me with a passion of delight. The moving heated blood of joy coursed through my heart, and warmed my very brain, till I seemed to become a creature of enchanting, quick intelligence, as if I had really caught the inspiration of David's wit; for never had I known David more fascinating in his wit! But

I will not try to give any idea of it. True to the rule I have all along laid down for myself, I refuse, and ever will refuse, to desecrate his witty sayings by my cold, pointless repetition. I feel it is only their old bones I could preserve, and I abhor old bones! What likeness is there between a hateful skull and the face whose living smile once filled us with great joy? I detest the dead wit, because I intensely love the living.

I was filled with gratitude towards David when I saw he laid himself out to be fascinating and delightful to me; for till now I had been accustomed to give and receive nothing in return.

The pleasant companion of my maiden dreams, idealised by my imagination, was not more charming than the real David proved to me; and too often (how well I knew it!) reality is but the ruthless destroyer of bright illusion. So for once in my life, instead of awaking to cruel disappointment, I awoke to the full satisfaction of the dreamer who rises from imaginary bliss to feel real, lively joy. I felt at last there was satisfaction to be found in life, and I was happy!

I actually caught myself wishing David might get into a scrape every six months, so as to give me continually the pleasure of his agreeable repentance. Luckily I had enough common-sense left to prevent my expressing this immoral sentiment aloud—but only just enough.

The three days we spent travelling from Paris to Havre were the happiest in my whole life, because David, and the ideal I had made of him and of his love, were one.

The remembrance of satisfaction and fulfilled joy is like a bright light, casting all other recollections of our journey into shade. The churches in Rouen have jumbled their naves together, and St Ouen is not as clear to my eye as it should be.

We went by water from Rouen to Havre. The day we passed on the river has left an impression of heavenly beauty on my mind. The weather, I know, was fine, but I have since heard people say the Seine has no scenery to boast of; so perhaps it was the rapture of my own soul, blending with the sunshine around me, which transfigured the flowing river to my sight.

We went down with the stream, and I liked to feel the river carry us onwards to the open sea—the moving water seemed to flow like the unchecked passion of my heart, and there was sympathy between its motion and my mood.

The sun had begun to set when we opened the mouth of the Seine and first saw the sea beyond: the sea was like boundless light before us, and the waves like moving, living joy upheaved from an unfathomed depth. There was satisfaction in the bound-

less light and boundless sea, stretching like an eternity of joy beyond the present hour.

We only remained two nights at Havre, starting thence for Southampton. We were bound for Scotland, but intended staying in London on our way. I cannot help thinking that perhaps one reason why David had suffered himself to be carried off from Paris so good-humouredly, was that we had received an invitation to join a shooting-party in Scotland. David's Scotch friend had asked me as well as my husband, and had written pressing David to come, and telling him he would lose all his autumn shooting if he indulged in too long a honeymoon. So I had proposed, much to David's delight, that we should go to Scotland, and not go to those distant parts of the earth where a man has no grouse to kill if he is bored, but only his wife or himself.

When in the very act of leaving Paris, I wrote to Aunt Jane saying we had started northwards, and would stop a day in London, and proposing to run down and see her and my uncle at Sherbrook Hall, and lunch with them if convenient. I naturally expected to find an answer awaiting me in Montagu Square, instead of which I only found a pack of advertising circulars. I opened a dozen, and ten of them recommended me to lay in a store of some particular kind of brandy, and of some remarkably pure sherry. All the circulars were directed to me, with the exception of one very black-bordered envelope addressed to my husband—"Somebody wanting to bury you, Davie!" cried I, gaily.

"Open it," said David, tossing the letter back to me; "a bargain is more tempting to a woman than a man! So tell me if you think the cheap funeral worth dying for!"

I broke the big black seal. There was no printed circular inside, but a letter—it was from Mr Boggle to David. I seemed to read and understand it in one glance. It fell from my shaking hand—Uncle Sherbrook was dead! Mr Boggle hoped David would be in time for the funeral.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

That all men must die is the one fact which nobody disputes. It is the veriest commonplace. We hear of death from our earliest childhood. If ever there was a word we should under-

stand, it is that one ! Its meaning should instantly be visible to our imagination, so that on hearing it we should be able to realise that absence from the well-known scene, just as if our heart had felt the empty place, and our eyes had really seen it.

Yet such is the force of habit, that, like unreasoning creatures, we look for the dead where we have been accustomed to see the living. Till the new habit is formed within us, we expect to see what we know we cannot see, while the sights we should expect startle and shock us.

When David and I drove along the front avenue hastening to Uncle Sherbrook's funeral, had I seen my uncle walking sedately in the highest and driest bit of the road, I should have forgotten I did not expect again to behold the familiar figure. It actually seemed strange to me not to see him, while the hearse I expected to see startled me as if it were a sudden, a horrid surprise. "We are late for the funeral. All is over, Sophy," said David, pointing to the hearse which stood, dismantled of its feathers, by the yard gate. "All is over!" I repeated ; for I saw the mutes sitting on the top of the hearse with their legs hanging down against the side : they were holding on to the pegs where the plumes had been, and were joking in jolly style. "Odious brutes!" muttered David. "They never knew him, David," said I ; yet the sight of these hardened men grieved and sickened me.

The sound of our carriage-wheels upon the gravel had announced our arrival. We found the porch door wide open, and some one awaiting us outside. I looked, and this man in deepest black was Rigardy-Wrenstone !

My cousin thrust his head through the carriage window before the horse had stopped. "The ceremony is over," said he in a low whisper ; "I personally superintended the arrangements, and saw the right people were invited. Hartmoor came down from town last night, and we put him up at the Abbey. Moultrie and half the county are here. Offaway sent his carriage, and so did Tankney, for I told Fred his father might send it if he liked." The whisper sank still lower—"I took care everything was done in a proper manner. I considered James Sherbrook ought to read the service, so I acted as chief mourner myself. I had Hartmoor at one side and Moultrie at the other. I found Hartmoor was a near connection through his mother."

"Chief mourner!" I exclaimed, and felt as if I were in a most unreal dream. I stared at Denis, and noticed he had a large black silk scarf over one shoulder, and I saw his countenance

did not contradict his words—he wore an air of grave and decorous sadness. He might have been my uncle's own son ! I was bewildered ; and I remember I turned to David, hoping for some explanation of the puzzle, but read nothing in my husband's face except the same perplexity I felt in my own mind.

“ Chief mourner ? ” said I to David ; “ he was chief mourner ! ” Our driver had not brought the fly close enough to the door-step, so Denis was telling him to bring it nearer, yet my cousin did not raise his voice—he whispered decorously to the coachman.

He helped me to alight and gave me his arm, just as my uncle might have done on his own door-step were he at home and not dead. I was astonished to feel myself entering Uncle Sherbrook's house leaning upon Rigardy-Wrenstone's arm. The strangeness of this circumstance made me understand there was indeed some great change in the old house. It almost forced me to realise that my uncle would not come out of the study and meet me in the hall—almost, but not quite ! So hard is it, amidst objects familiar to us from childhood and still unaltered, to grasp the new belief that what has been our whole life long is no more now.

The study-door opened. I started ! and for one short moment thought to see the well-known face.

It was Mr Boggle who had opened the door. When the attorney first caught sight of me, his countenance changed—a look of malignant joy crossed his face. It came one instant, and was subdued the next. So rapidly and entirely did the sudden expression disappear that I barely saw it, for perceiving it, I looked for it, and it was gone—Mr Boggle wore his usual bland, imperturbable mask again. At a distance, when backed by his long white hair, its benevolence looked imposing ; but closely examined, there was a hard cunning in the face which fixed the bland lines, and prevented mobile change, as if the substance underneath were too hard to move or to be moved. When by accident, once in a way, a new expression crossed his face, it was a surprise : you remarked it, and could not easily forget it.

Mr Boggle walked forwards and shook hands with me : it was the first time he had ever done so, as his manner was generally one of bowing subservience. I remember feeling a little surprised, when he did take my hand, that he did not keep it a moment in his, and pressing it, like a saint whose touch is a blessing, did not make some remark on the shortness of life and the irreparable loss I had sustained. But instead of

softly breathing some word of edifying consolation, Mr Boggle spoke out loudly, indeed in a louder tone than usual. "This is the late Mr Sherbrook's will," he said to me, and touched with one hand the parchment roll he held in the other—"Mrs Scott, if you and these gentlemen will follow me into the dining-room, I shall proceed immediately to read the will."

Rigardy-Wrenstone opposed my joining the party already assembled in the dining-room. A short discussion ensued between him and Mr Boggle. My cousin's hushed tones were nearly inaudible to my ear, but I heard all Mr Boggle said. The attorney said it was not unusual for ladies to be present on these occasions, and declared no one would expect to see me in mourning, the reason of my late appearance being fully known. "This is a matter," said Mr Boggle, "in which Mrs Scott may surely be allowed entirely to consult her own wishes. Not that I imagine this document will be found to contain any disposition of property unexpected by Mrs Scott. I conceive Mrs Scott to be as fully acquainted with the late lamented Mr Sherbrook's testamentary intentions as I am. Madam," he added, turning to me, "I am aware you had frequent discussions with Mr Sherbrook upon the subject of his will—discussions of an exciting character. Mr Sherbrook was not a man to be easily led."

I barely grasped what Mr Boggle was saying to me. It is David who has since recalled the exact words to my memory. At the time, I only felt in a confused kind of way, from the attorney's tone and manner, that he meant something I did not quite understand, and that altogether he was not the man I had hitherto known. I again thought I was living in a dream, where nothing or nobody seemed right or natural. This paralysis of mind was partly due to the horror I had conceived of my first meeting with Aunt Jane. This cowardice (I can call it by no other name) had seized me from the moment I read the fatal letter in Montagu Square. I intensely dreaded my aunt's boisterous grief. I am a selfish coward. I know I am, for when I am moved myself, I shrink from the sight of tears and lamentation as from actual physical pain.

We had reached the foot of the staircase—another moment, and I should be in Aunt Jane's presence. I eagerly seized the delay Mr Boggle offered me, and followed him into the dining-room almost gladly, so great was my cowardly relief at even a few minutes' respite from the pain I feared.

There were a good many gentlemen in the room, but no lady—I instantly perceived Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart's absence. The

Rector was there: he rose and gave me his own chair, and looked at me kindly with a look which told me his heart had been touched this day. I found old Sir John Moultrie seated next me: he, too, had a kind and softened air; but I saw at a glance, by the other solemnly inquisitive faces around me, that no one else had felt real sorrow this forenoon beside the open grave. I was nervously glad to see no tears and hear no sobs.

The changed aspect of the room where my uncle used to perform in stately fashion the daily ceremony of three punctual meals, was a kind of shock to me, and yet the queer thought struck me how pleased Uncle Sherbrook would be could he but come himself and read his own will to this solemn assembly. I smiled, for I could see him and hear the very tone of voice in which I knew he would read that perfect will, that masterpiece of sound judgment and of law! The vision was so true to his nature, that I think I believed in it, for the attorney's voice fell like flat disappointment on my heart—it roughly tore away my last illusion. There was something unmistakably real in hearing Mr Boggle read my uncle's will amidst profound silence. This very silence told of death—it was the silence of men who hold their breath in awe.

Except the attorney and the Rector, all present were gentlemen, more or less, of fortune. To such there is a fearful solemnity in the fact that we take nothing away with us when we die, but are robbed as if by a thief at the last hour. Just at the very time we might like to find some comfort in our wealth, our house and good estates are taken from us, and we go like a wretched, nameless beggar into the grave. The will of a man leaving to others lands and money, which a few days since he held tightly in his own grasp, forces this truth upon us.

The still, deep, breathless silence made the one voice sound intensely clear. There could be no delusion, no mistake in the words spoken by that hard, unmoved tone. I felt it would proclaim, like unimpassioned justice, James Sherbrook's right to be my uncle's heir. I heard the well-remembered, "I, Edward Brewen Stewart Sherbrook of Sherbrook Hall, in the county of Dullshire, Esquire, give, devise, and bequeath;" and I expected immediately to hear James Sherbrook's name. I sprang to my feet with a cry, for instead of the Rector's name, I heard the name of Gordon-Sherbrook Stewart!

The poor Rector stood beside me, and I saw him turn deadly pale, and then redden in shame at having betrayed emotion. Instinctively I laid my hand upon his shoulder, as if I would point him out to all the world as my uncle's rightful heir.

Yet I did not for one moment doubt my ears. Gordon-Sherbrook's name came to me more like a revelation than a surprise. I was awakened by it instantaneously to see the admirable Catherine's deep intrigue. I believed in the cruel robbery as if I had foreseen it, because I believed in Mrs Stewart's grasping, unrelenting cruelty, with an undoubting soul. I recognised this will to be her handiwork.

I paid breathless attention; because it seemed to me that Sherbrook Hall went straight to Captain Stewart, and did not go to Aunt Jane for life. I wondered if poor Aunt Jane were also left a penniless outcast! Her name was mentioned once; she was to have the interest of £10,000. There were legacies to servants, to Mr Boggle as executor, but no legacy to Aunt Jane! and, strange enough, none to Mrs Stewart. I listened intently, for I remembered that in the will my uncle had read me, Aunt Jane had been left residuary legatee. I listened in vain. I heard her name no more. It was not she, but Gordon-Sherbrook, who was now left residuary legatee.

Mr Boggle stopped reading.

There was a moment's intenser silence than before, and then a rising whisper.

"This is not my uncle's will!" I cried.

The awaking sound was hushed, and my trembling voice echoed in the death-like silence which again had fallen around me. I felt the silence like a pain: it would have choked me had I not known the moment now within my grasp would never return to me, and therefore made one great effort to speak before it was too late.

"Uncle Sherbrook read me his own will," I said, "and by it the Rector was his heir. My uncle left this house and place to Aunt Jane for life, and he left her money to keep them up, and made her residuary legatee besides." I spoke quickly, fearing I never should get time to tell the whole truth. I saw Mr Boggle crossing the room hurriedly towards me, hastening, as I thought, to silence me. Before I had finished speaking, Mr Boggle and I stood face to face. He kept his usual countenance unmoved, but there was suppressed fury in his eye.

"It is easily conceived," said he, addressing himself to the curious crowd surrounding us—"it is easily conceived," he said, in a loud clear voice, "that a will might not give entire satisfaction to a lady whose name is not mentioned in it."

I grasped the meaning of these words, and felt it to be an insult.

"My name, sir," said I, proudly, "was not mentioned in my uncle's former will."

"I, madam," retorted Mr Boggle, "can prove the contrary, Mr Sherbrook himself having informed me of the fact."

"He is right; your name was there. Don't have a row with that rascally attorney, Sophy. You will get the worst of it now," whispered David in one ear; while Sir John Moultrie whispered in the other, "Wait till the old will is found, Mrs Scott, or that clever knave will put you at the wrong side of the law, and make you ruin poor James Sherbrook's case."

I was silenced by David's words. "He is right; your name was there," had strangled me. I saw a canny, unbelieving smile on the many strange faces surrounding me, and I felt the present moment had passed into Mr Boggle's hands, and was no longer in my own.

I was abashed. I was bewildered too, and I left the room without another word. Rigardy-Wrenstone, as master of the ceremonies, offered me his arm, but I preferred to go and meet Aunt Jane alone.

I went quickly. I did not dare to stop and think. I should have dreaded to collect my senses. My uncle's incomprehensible will, and the scene I had just borne part in, had fairly scattered them. The dream-like feeling that all I saw and heard must be unreal, had once more taken possession of me. I no longer understood the present hour, so its pain was stilled to me.

I had my hand upon the door of Aunt Jane's room; a scream startled me, and Harriet Snipkins darted out of my uncle's dressing-room, exclaiming, "Lor', Miss Sophy! his it you? How you did frighten me, to be sure!" The girl seized my hand, and said in a scared undertone, "The master died in there, and the room has never been cleaned hout since. Miss Snipkins says Mrs Helizabeth must do hit hout to-morrow, but Mrs Helizabeth his sadly hafeered, halthough Miss Snipkins says it was nothing hinfecitious killed the poor master, but just honly mere common pralersis, which nobody never took, hexcept hof themselves. But, you see, Miss Sophy, Mrs Helizabeth she does not like to be the first person to go in there since the death. She says the first person has goes in will die before the year's hout, and she counts the hundertaker's men has nobody, for she says hundertakers his not hany of the family. She won't credit me when I tell her Mrs Stewart has been hin there hopening hof drawers, and ha-taking hout of papers, and ha-reading letters, and long before hever the body was carried

away. I saw her hexact likeness through the keyhole of the dressing-room, for, hearing a sound, I thought it might be a ghost prowling habout like a body-snatcher, which, they say, some hof them spirits his. But, Lor' ! Mrs Helizabeth, she will huphold it was a real ghost I saw, and Miss Snipkins backs her hup, and swears to it, and threatens to give me notice, and have me turned right hout of the 'ouse if I dare tell hany one it was Mrs Stewart, so I honly tell you in confidence, Miss Sophy ; I beg pardon, ma'am, I meant to say Mrs Scott, ma'am."

The girl looked round. Her eyes grew bigger, and she whispered, "I've been looking hin hagain, ma'am. There is no one there, so maybe hit's gone to the churchyard, for if hit was not Mrs Stewart"—she trembled from head to foot—"hit was no hother living woman !"

She shook and stared as if frightened out of her very wits.

" Harriet, it may have been my aunt you saw," said I.

" Oh, Lor' !" she screamed ; " Lor', ma'am ! hit was not poor Mrs Sherbrook ! Bless her, poor lady, she's never has much has crossed this 'ere lobby since the day the master died. She has slept in that 'ere room of yours, Miss Sophy, for you and Mr Scott are to be in the red room, ma'am, and she's stayed in there hall by herself, poor lady, and nobody has 'ardly never gone nigh her, for Mrs Stewart has been that busy hordering hof heverybody and heverything, and taking hof what she calls a hinventory in betimes, and Miss Snipkins has been ha taking hof that hinventory too, so the poor mistress 'as been crying and stringing hof her jet necklaces, and hof yours too, ma'am, from morning till night, with double helastic. She says one helastic won't hold them jet-beads. Her happetite's been bad, Miss Sophy, which Miss Hemma says is most huncommon for her ; and halthough she's got her mourning now quite complete, and put it hon, cap and hall, she heats none the better. Perhaps, miss, you could make her heat more if you just coaxed her a bit, for she likes to be coaxed to heat, halthough she takes to crying, and says *no*, but I coaxed her to heat a hegg, and she hate it."

" You say she is in my old room, Harriet ?" said I, and I went in there.

Aunt Jane had her back to the door. She stood by the window holding up to the light a big jet cross of mine, which she was threading to a black bead necklace. She was dressed in the deepest weeds, and her ringlets were pushed back under a widow's cap ; the absence of the familiar curls made a great

change in her appearance. Her face was pale, and her eyes were very red, and she had a wretched, irritable, scared sort of look.

I had entered the room softly, and she had not heard my step. She was talking to herself, and shaking her head. The sight of her nervous, excited misery touched me.

When I got about half-way across the room she heard me coming, and put down the jet necklace, and turning towards me with outstretched arms, exclaimed, "Oh, Catherine! Catherine!" For a full minute she seemed unable to believe that I was myself. When at length she realised it was Sophy, and not Catherine, whom she had all but embraced, her conduct was amazing and unintelligible. She pushed me from her, and burst into a wail of tears, crying, "Go away, Sophy! go away! never come near me again; I can't bear to see you. Edward never asked for any one but you." She threw herself upon the sofa, and hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Aunt Jane, don't cry," said I, soothingly; "don't cry, my dear."

I thought her poor senses had quite left her. Kneeling before her, I gently tried to take her hands in mine and wipe away her tears, as I should a weeping child's. At first she kept her two hands tightly clasped across her eyes; then unclasping them, as if in a fit of sudden passion, she struck me on the forehead, I think unintentionally; but seeing she had hit me, she only said querulously, "Why do you come so near? go away! go away, Sophy! I tell you I don't want to see you any more." And again she covered her face with her hands, and sobbed hysterically, but talked between each sob. I thought it better to let her talk on without remark or interruption. "He was always asking for you" (a sob). "I don't know why he cared for you" (a sob). "Never liked your marrying" (a sob); "selfish" (a sob), "ungrateful" (a sob and a pause, but not a long one). "Edward never asked for any one but you, never! never! and at the last . . ." The remembrance of that awful time when life was ebbing into death almost sobered my aunt. She repeated in a solemn whisper, "At the last he did not know me or anybody, and he thought my hand was yours, and he said good-bye to you, Sophy, and he did not say good-bye to me. Go away! go away, Sophy! I can't bear to see you!" and my poor aunt wept again as if her heart would break, but I felt hardened towards her. I rose from my knees.

"He thought your hand was mine. He thought I stood beside him!" I said, and tears of passionate sorrow started to

my eyes. "Oh, Aunt Jane! Aunt Jane!" I exclaimed, in bitter, angry grief, "why was I not told that he was dying till he was dead?"

My anger startled Aunt Jane and stayed the flow of her tears. She sat up and wailed out in the querulous tone habitual to her—"I am always in the wrong, always! If I write, I am in the wrong, and Catherine thinks so; and if I don't write, I am in the wrong, and you think so, and Catherine told me not to write, for she said you would be in the way, and be getting round your uncle, and be taking my proper place, and be turning me out, and . . ."

"You have been cruelly selfish!" I cried, passionately,— "wickedly selfish! and never can I forgive you!"

My poor aunt let fall her handkerchief, as if she were too much bewildered to cry, and commenced the despairing wail again. "You won't forgive me! and Catherine won't forgive me! and Snipkins won't forgive me! and I am sure James Sherbrook won't forgive me either! though I have never done anything, and I have tried to please everybody, and I prayed the Lord might direct me to choose Edward's heir, and Catherine prayed too, and it was when Catherine was praying that she first thought of Gordon-Sherbrook—she had never thought of him before, and I am sure it was the Almighty put the idea into her head, because poor James Sherbrook is so very High Church, and all the fortune might go to Cardinal Manning and the Jesuits, and Gordon-Sherbrook's name came into my head at the same time it came into Catherine's, and Catherine says his name was a direct answer to our joint prayers, but poor, dear Edward, he was so queer! Oh, so queer! so queer! He never would see Catherine again after he made his last will; because, he said, he did not want to change his will till he got better, and that Catherine would tease him, and he was sure he had made some mistake in his new will, and that somebody was forgotten in it, only he did not know who it was, and sometimes he thought it was you, Sophy, and sometimes he thought it was James Sherbrook. Poor dear Edward! he got what Dr Daly would call his second stroke, the very next day after he made his will, but it was not really a stroke at all, Sophy, only a very bad sort of jaundice, very bad indeed! much worse than he had ever had before! And when he made his new will he hated Catherine to come into the room, and he would not let Snipkins come in, and he said he did not want to be worried any more, but that when he got well he would change his will again, and if you had come, Sophy, I am quite

sure Edward would have hated you too the very instant he saw you, because he really and truly hated every one except me, and then you would have thought it was all my fault! And it was not my fault at all! though I know every one thinks it was! and Snipkins sends Harriet to wait upon me, and Snipkins is cross when she does come, and says she has not time to dress me in the morning, and Catherine never comes near me, Sophy, never, never!" The tears rolled down Aunt Jane's cheeks. "I thought now poor dear Edward was gone, Catherine would be kind to me, and read me the Bible, and some of the tracts in her hand-bag, and ask me to eat when I am not hungry! And I suppose, Sophy, you will do just the same, and leave me all by myself to think over and over again that Edward never said good-bye to me!" Aunt Jane's voice was lost in a long sob.

But I did not relent towards her or try to comfort her. I said with cold severity, "He was dead before you told me he was dying, yet he was asking for me always. You say he was."

Aunt Jane began her wail, her tiresome wail again, but I did not know what she was saying. I listened to her no more, and gave no answer when she stopped for one.

I stood away from her. My thoughts were bent in silent anguish upon the awful meaning I gathered from her rambling words—a death-bed worried by will-makers; a dying man dreading his tormentors, and shrinking from them with impotent hatred!

Oh, what a fearful sight was this I saw revealed to me! I felt as if the curtain of a dark dungeon had been drawn aside, and I had seen my uncle in the hands of torturers; and with no one to comfort him but one poor, dismayed, bewildered, jealous soul, the helpless tool of those cruel wretches who had forced a good and upright man to do a great wrong when his strength and clear mind were failing him. It is a cursed thing to make an honourable man belie a just life, and sully it on his deathbed by an unjust will! No cruelty is more devilish than this!

I noticed Aunt Jane had said my uncle got another stroke the day after he made his will. I could well imagine the agitation which had killed him. I could conceive the remorse he felt at being forced to do a wrong which he could not clearly understand and undo, and yet knew to be a wrong.

Then I could imagine, too, the half-paralysed consciousness of those last days when my poor uncle still remembered I should love him as a daughter and be with him, and yet asked

for me and asked in vain ! I could not bear the grief of such a thought.

“Aunt Jane,” said I, suddenly breaking in upon the never-ending wail—“Aunt Jane, I hate you for your mean jealousy ! You have thrust it like a crime between the dying man and me ! I cannot forgive you. I hate you for this crime !” She screamed and rushed towards me, but I left her abruptly.

Anger drove all pity from my heart, and filled it with burning indignation. Never in my whole life had I been so angry ! I was beside myself with passion—a passion all the more intense because its agony was powerless : it could not bring back the dead to life ; it could not let me say the few, few words to him who had been like a father to me, which would explain my cruel absence, my callous silence. Impotent rage quite maddened me. I swore to punish Aunt Jane, to be revenged upon her, to make her feel that same pain of abandoned neglect which she had made Uncle Sherbrook feel on his deathbed.

So totally engrossed was I by my own thoughts, that instead of going into the red room which I knew had been prepared for me, I walked straight into the green one. A scream from Snipkins brought me to my senses, and Mrs Stewart’s presence told me where I was.

The admirable Catherine sat at a small writing-table by the bedside. She had a pen in her right hand, and in the left she held the big embossed silver teapot with the bear’s head spout—the teapot which Aunt Jane so loved and admired, and which she used every day of her life.

The whole bed was covered with plate. I saw the silver branch and smaller candlesticks, the big and little salvers, and the two tankards, and the old ancestral punch-bowl, besides the four dancing-bear muffineers, other salt-cellars, and spoons and forks innumerable.

I do not think my unexpected, inopportune appearance disconcerted Mrs Stewart in the very slightest degree—at least she betrayed neither annoyance nor embarrassment. Snipkins, on the contrary, looked like a thief caught in the act, and attracted my attention to the linen she was sorting by covering a pile of tablecloths with her dress and apron.

“Oh ! is it you, Sophy ? How do you do ?” said Mrs Stewart, and she gave me a nod. “In a moment !” she added, not stirring, but waiting first to finish what she was writing when I entered. While she wrote she seemed to be weighing the silver teapot in her left hand, and she looked at it anxiously, covetously, as if she wished it to be even heavier and more

valuable than it was. She knitted her brows and had the air of a person whose whole heart and mind are absorbed in fixed attention. She turned the teapot upside down, and curiously examined the silver mark. A kind of smile played round her thin, greedy lips.

I could not bear to look at her! To my eye, she was like some lean and hungry carrion crow intent upon the first morsels of its horrid feast. I turned on my heel and left the room more quickly than I had entered it.

Dreading lest the hateful woman might come after me, I ran into the red room and locked the door.

She knew the poor dead man! cried I, weeping hot tears; and she ate of his bread, and lived in his house, and flattered him; and he was only buried to-day! Only to-day! The grass has not grown over his coffin, and even strangers as they pass the churchyard will ask who lies in the fresh, brown grave; yet she has already forgotten his kindness and his death! I remembered the jovial mutes joking on the hearse, but this heartless woman, this camp-follower, filled me with far deeper disgust than they. To me she was like one of those greedy sutlers we read of in dark tales of war, who follow death with joy.

The admirable Catherine was so pleasantly occupied that she left me to myself. We did not meet until dinner-time. Dinner was an hour later than was usual at Sherbrook Hall. David and I finding no one in the drawing-room, at length went into the dining-room. Mrs Stewart was already there. She shook hands with David, and would have shaken hands with me, but I shrank from her touch, saying, "We met before."

She had a perfectly unembarrassed though somewhat preoccupied air; but there was not an atom of sadness or hypocrisy about her—she seemed impatient at being kept waiting for dinner, like a person who has a great deal of business to do. "Mrs Sherbrook told me she would dine with us to-night, but she is not here, so we had better sit down without her. Dinner is late enough as it is." Thus saying, the admirable Catherine coolly took her place at the head of the table. Seeing we were in no hurry to follow her example, she said—"Who knows when she will come? I left her an hour ago with Mr Boggle, and he was trying to make her understand the provisions of Mr Sherbrook's will. I tried first, but found her mind was all at sixes and sevens, and she would pretend to believe that everything belongs to her! So I handed her over to Mr Boggle, but even he won't be able to make short work of her nonsense. We find she has got a whole set of securities and shares she

has no right to, and only main force will make her give them up."

"What sort of securities?" asked David, shortly, with the look of a man who suddenly suspects there is something wrong. "I will inquire about these shares and these securities, Mrs Stewart." While David was speaking, George threw the doors open from the outside, and Aunt Jane came in.

My heart smote me when I saw the poor, bewildered thing! David went up to her and greeted her kindly: she looked at him in a distracted manner, and said nothing, and did not cry.

Mrs Stewart made a faint, the faintest possible attempt at rising from her chair. "You need not move, Catherine," said Aunt Jane, in a hoarse voice; "Mr Boggle says this is not my house any longer."

Yet Aunt Jane lingered beside the place she was accustomed to consider her own. Mrs Stewart opened her napkin. "Very well!" she exclaimed, "if you won't sit here, I will. Perhaps, indeed," she added, "it may help you to realise things are changed, and that would be a real blessing to us all! George, uncover the soup!"

No one but a woman can torment a woman, thought I; and I felt that to make a person like Aunt Jane thus abdicate her seat of honour was the very refinement of cruelty.

"George," I said severely, to the butler, who was obeying Mrs Stewart's orders, "wait until your mistress is seated." I well knew how much my aunt prized small acts of respectful etiquette.

Dear David was moved to sympathy by poor Aunt Jane's evident humiliation. He took her hand and led her gently to Uncle Sherbrook's vacant chair. Aunt Jane drew back. "Edward's seat!" said she, in an awestruck whisper,—"no one must take Edward's chair."

And she sat down at one side of the table and gazed at the empty place, as if by much looking her tearless eyes could fill it. It was strange she did not cry! Her unwonted calmness almost frightened me; it touched me more than tears. She glanced from my uncle's usual place to her own accustomed one, and then, having once turned her eyes that way, she seemed unable to remove them.

The admirable Catherine was giving herself a second helping of soup, and Aunt Jane stared at her as if fascinated by some strange sight. At last Mrs Stewart became aware of the unchanging gaze. She looked up, and said sharply, "I wish

you would not stare so, Mrs Sherbrook. It is quite unpleasant."

"Oh, Catherine! Catherine!" cried Aunt Jane, "I am looking to see if it is really, really and truly you, for I can't believe what I see. I can't believe anything! and I hope I am not getting silly, because I am afraid Mr Boggle thinks I am, and he used to think me very clever! but I cannot understand anything now! for poor dear Edward never, never told me that everybody and everything would change when he was dead and gone away." Her troubled voice was piteous to hear. Her wrinkled, distressed face pained me, and I noticed a loose and fallen look about her under jaw which I did not remember having seen before. I was suddenly filled with a great compassion for her; I thought I had been cruel to her; my anger melted, and I repented of its violence.

Pity is the strongest passion in our heart next to love, and, like love, it overcomes us unawares, and moves our firmest resolve: rushing as a sudden flood upon the heart, it carries angry grievances, like old landmarks, far away.

"Aunt Jane," said I, softly; I sat next to her,—"do try and eat. Eat a little, my dear, just a little, to please me!" The sound of my voice coaxing her as she loved to be coaxed had a strange effect upon her nerves; she bent her head and wept aloud.

"Oh, Sophy!" she sobbed, "Mr Boggle says you hate me because of poor dear Edward's will. I told him you hated me, and he said that was the reason. But oh, Sophy! it is not my fault! It is not my fault! It is Mr Boggle's own fault, for he did not do what Edward told him! Edward told him to make me residuary legatee, and Mr Boggle did not do it, and there is some mistake in Edward's will!" The admirable Catherine stopped eating as if shot by a gun. She tried in all haste to silence Aunt Jane, but in vain. I think my aunt's own sobs deafened her. "Edward told Mr Boggle," continued my weeping aunt, "to make me residuary legatee, and Mr Boggle says he did . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook!" interrupted Mrs Stewart, but without effect.

"Mr Boggle says he did, and I know what residuary legatee means, because Edward always explained it to me, and he always made me residuary legatee in all his wills, because there is some mistake about my marriage settlements, so Edward always made me residuary legatee, always in all his wills . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook!"

"Always in all his wills ! and Mr Boggle says he would have let Edward leave me a great deal more if he had known there were £45,000 of shares in the brown tin box, but he knew nothing about them, because Edward never told him, Edward never let Mr Boggle help him to make any of his wills till he was dying, and Edward told Mr Boggle what was in the last will Edward and I had made, and he told him Sophy's name was in it, and I heard him, and Mr Boggle took it away from Edward and burnt it, and Edward wanted to get out of bed and save it, but he could not move, and it was burnt before I could find the tongs. . . ." Aunt Jane grew more and more excited, and more impossible to interrupt. "Edward did not like his new will at all !" she cried—"not at all ! and he went on repeating he was sure there was some mistake in it, something wrong about James Sherbrook ; and when I told him Gordon-Sherbrook was now his heir, because James was so High Church, Edward could not understand me. He was so queer ! oh, so queer ! and always thinking of Sophy, and saying he had not heard Sophy's name in his will, and making me promise over and over again to leave Sophy at least £30,000 when I die, because I was residuary legatee, and would get all the shares in the brown tin box. But Mr Boggle has not done what Edward told him ! Mr Boggle has not made me residuary legatee." Aunt Jane was forced to take breath.

A look of great fear crossed Mrs Stewart's face : I saw her cast a furtive glance at David and the servants. She called my aunt to order in the severest and most penetrating rasp of her voice. Aunt Jane could not help hearing her. "Mrs Sherbrook !" she called out, "take care what you are saying ! an action for libel would lie against you."

An action for libel was at all times the most awful of vague terrors to Aunt Jane. Sheer fright calmed her sobs. She threw up her hands, gaped her mouth, and opened her eyes in horrified alarm. "What have I said wrong ?" she asked ; "oh, don't tell Mr Boggle, Catherine ! don't tell him if I have said anything wrong, for I don't want to have a lawsuit, and that was why Edward was always making his will, so that everything might be quite clear and right when he died, and really, really I only say what is quite true . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook . . ."

"Quite true, but nobody will believe me now, though you ought to believe me, Catherine ; indeed, indeed you ought ! even if you are angry with me, because it was you, Catherine,

who found the share-book in the brown tin box, in my own wardrobe, where Edward had made me hide it that night when he was so feverish ; poor dear Edward told me never, never to give it to Mr Boggle, for he thought Mr Boggle had made a mistake in his will, and Snipkins heard him, and I promised Edward I would not give it to any one. I promised him on his deathbed ! but Mr Boggle has made me give him everything, though poor dear Edward told me not ! he told me not !” and she repeated, “he told me not !” several times, but with dry eyes, and in a terrified, tearless voice. Really I feared she might be losing the little remains of her reason ; for I declare she looked half mad—like a distracted creature who had committed some great crime, and knew it, but did not know how or why.

Aunt Jane stopped repeating “he told me not !” and then there was dead silence in the room. David was all eyes and ears ; the servants stood still and listened. Yet Mrs Stewart was speechless ; she seemed taken aback. But it was only for a moment she thus lost her presence of mind. That short moment passed, and the admirable Catherine, as if by a miracle, was again in full possession of her very remarkable faculties. With supple tact, in the twinkling of an eye, she appeared to have changed her nature, and almost did change her rasping voice.

“Poor dear Mrs Sherbrook !” she cried, rising from table, and hastening to Aunt Jane’s side,—“poor dear Mrs Sherbrook ! no wonder you are distracted, and can understand nothing after all you have gone through ! After that dreadful week, when poor Mr Sherbrook did not know what he was saying or doing.”

“Indeed, indeed, Catherine,” exclaimed Aunt Jane, “it was a dreadful time ! dreadful ! and poor dear Edward knew nobody ! He thought I was Sophy, and said good-bye to her, and never said good-bye to me. Edward never said good-bye to me !” And Aunt Jane’s tearful sorrow was fresh opened again.

“Don’t blame him, dear Mrs Sherbrook. He did not know what he was saying ! His death was a happy release at the last ! a happy release ! a mercy to be thankful for ! My dear Mrs Sherbrook, no one could have wished him to live on in that dreadful, half-paralysed state. . . .” And then the best of women dwelt with eloquence upon my uncle’s last sufferings. My poor aunt was visibly affected by the recollection of his sad restless pain. “I was not always in the room, my dear Mrs

Sherbrook," said Mrs Stewart ; " but I was always near enough to hear and see and suffer with him and you."

" Oh, Catherine, Catherine ! you are kind to me again !" cried Aunt Jane, laying her head on Mrs Stewart's shoulder ; " you are very kind to forgive me so soon, but really, really, Catherine, it was not my fault that poor dear Edward would not see you. It was Edward's own fault, and he said he hated . . ."

Aunt Jane could not finish her sentence, because Mrs Stewart forced her rather suddenly to drink a glass of water. " Drink this, and you will feel better soon. My poor dear Mrs Sherbrook, you will be better soon ! This is a dreadful day for you ; the day of your husband's funeral !"

" Oh, Edward, Edward !" sobbed Aunt Jane, " was he only buried to-day ? It seems such a long time, Catherine, since I saw the funeral moving away from the front door !"

" Yes, yes, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, he was buried to-day, and it is just three days since you saw him lying in his coffin."

At the recollection of that sight my aunt shivered from head to foot, but did not speak.

" He was so deadly pale," said Mrs Stewart. Aunt Jane still trembled, but neither spoke nor cried. " He was so deadly pale," repeated Mrs Stewart. " Oh, Mrs Sherbrook ! have you forgotten how he looked that awful day ?"

She is a fiend, thought I. Aunt Jane gave a horrid scream. " It was you who made me look at him, Catherine !" she cried, and was seized with a fit of hysterics.

The admirable Catherine was then so kind to her ; oh, so kind ! and soothed and petted her, and held a wet handkerchief to her forehead, and sent George to ask Harriet for her sal-volatile, and Thomas to ask Snipkins for her eau-de-Cologne. I think Mrs Stewart feared the servants' ears far more than she did either David's or mine.

When Aunt Jane became somewhat composed, Mrs Stewart advised her not to tax her poor distracted nerves by remaining any longer in the room, where she had hardly ever eaten a meal without poor dear Mr Sherbrook : " It is that memory which upsets you, my dear Mrs Sherbrook !" and she persuaded my aunt to finish her dinner in the drawing-room. Poor Aunt Jane seemed almost pleased to think she was too much overcome to eat in the dining-room. Calming into long sobs, she leant on Catherine's neck, and was thus helped by her dear indefatigable creature into the next room. Catherine said she could not leave Mrs Sherbrook—she must try and coax

poor dear Mrs Sherbrook to eat something ; so she had the rest of her own dinner sent into the drawing-room as well as my aunt's.

David was quite mystified by the conduct of these (to him) most incomprehensible of ladies.

While the servants were in the room we did not speak. When they left David got up from table, and stood looking blankly out of the window. David whistled in a low tone. "Hush, David !" said I ; "Aunt Jane may hear you whistling, and be hurt." David stopped instantly, and said he was not aware he had been whistling. "I am thinking, Sophy !" he exclaimed, "or rather I am trying to think ! It is hardly possible to unravel anything in this house ; you never even know if people are friends or enemies ! One's own head gets confused ! yet I am sure there has been some treachery and cheating about this will. I am sure there has !"

"I know it, David," I answered ; "because my uncle really liked James Sherbrook, and intended to make him his heir."

"Yes," said David ; "in the former will James Sherbrook was his heir. Your aunt was left residuary legatee, and you were left the reversion of £30,000. Your uncle read me that will the day before our marriage. It is perfectly clear to me the attorney did not draw up the will your uncle told him to make. This is clear enough to me, and may be to you, Sophy, but it will never be clear to anybody else—never ! Your poor Aunt Jane is in a hopeless state of mind. I declare she makes me feel as if my own brains were topsy-turvy ! No evidence of hers would be worth a straw. There is no understanding her,—no understanding anything ! There is nothing clear in this house,—nothing sure and certain but your uncle's death. He is dead. That alone is clear ! for I can't even make out what he died of. I have asked everybody here except your aunt, and it is no good asking her ! she would vow he was killed by repeated chills on the liver. The servants tell me Dr Daly says he died of paralysis. Mr Boggle calls it suppressed gout. They all call it something, yet no two agree."

"Ah, David !" I replied, "it was seventy-three years of age Uncle Sherbrook died of ; it was seventy-three long years ! but no one likes to call that illness by its name. Most people seem unable to believe in that sickness from which there is no recovery. Although," said I bitterly, "that disease, David, which so few believe in, has killed more men and women in this country-side than ever the plague would kill !"

Time, relentless cruel Time, is indeed a terrible poisoner ! and with a cup for ever in his hand. He sits in a graveyard,

and mixes our potion at his ease ; quietly and ever so slowly, and yet for all men—not only for my poor uncle, who was just dead ! but for all men—he has a poison that will kill. He forgets no one ! We should not deceive ourselves. No one will be forgotten by him. Our joy does not move him, and our sorrow will not touch him, for he is too old at the dreadful trade of killing all men, good and bad, and rich and poor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

David is essentially of an easy-going nature ; he dislikes doing unpleasant things even more than most men.

The morning after our arrival at Sherbrook Hall I begged David to examine and question my aunt in all haste, while there might still be a hope she would stick to the facts she was so full of the evening before.

“ Examine your aunt ! question your aunt ! ” exclaimed David. “ By Jove ! by Jove ! ”

“ Be quick about it, David,” I urged, “ or she will be confusing the clear story she almost told yesterday. To-morrow, with the judicious help of her Catherine and Mr Boggle, she may be sincerely under some new and wrong impression. Examine her to-day.”

“ Examine her ! ” repeated David. “ By Jove ! by Jove ! ”

I continued urging him to act without delay, but he dreaded Aunt Jane’s hysterics, and had quite a horror of her mind, which, like the banyan-tree, sent forth endless branches, each branch a root, each root a tree, casting afresh new branches, new roots, new trees. “ It is a provoking mind, David,” I said ; “ I know it is ! But have patience with it. Think of poor Uncle Sherbrook, Davie, dear. Think what a stain this will casts upon his memory.”

“ Yes, indeed,” said my husband ; “ a will which cuts off his natural heir, and leaves his widow next door to a beggar ! And for a man to make it,” he exclaimed, “ who never did anything else but make his will ! ”

“ Ah ! ” cried I, and tears filled my eyes, “ this is the sorest point of all ! It grieves my very heart to think that which a man has been most proud of in his life, and thought he did so well, should just be exactly the very thing which at the last he

did badly, even worse, in a manner, to bring reproach upon his memory!"

Had Uncle Sherbrook never taken pride in his aptitude for business, and for law, this particular stroke which bewildering death, approaching him, felled upon his clear mind, would not have seemed so cruel a hit to me. But there was bitter irony in thus striking a man foolish where he had thought himself, and others thought him, so wise!"

"Your uncle and aunt between them," said David, "have made a hopeless mess of their affairs! But we are in a delicate position, Sophy."

"No," said I; "for should this will be broken, my uncle would be declared to have died intestate; you and I would get nothing, but Aunt Jane and James Sherbrook would."

"Poor Sherbrook!" exclaimed David; "it is awfully hard lines on him! awfully!" He pitied the unfortunate Rector intensely, and he even pitied Aunt Jane,—"a more utterly helpless human being never existed!" he said.

I eagerly seized this favourable opportunity, and so worked on David's compassion and sense of justice, that at last I got him to promise he would speak to Aunt Jane. I hastened the interview, fearing he might change his mind and fight shy of her if he were given time for reflection. I brought the two together and then slipped away, thinking David would have a better chance of picking Aunt Jane's brains if alone with her, than if "Sophy" were by as a kind of standing transition provoking sundry little irrelevant *asides*.

David came out of my aunt's room in a more hopeful state of mind than I could possibly have expected. "I declare," he exclaimed, "she actually sticks to what she said last night!"

"No wonder you are surprised."

And David told me he had sent for Mr Boggle, as Aunt Jane had promised to tell the same story to the attorney's face which she had just told behind his back. "I had not far to send, Sophy; for that Boggle is in the study, where he and Mrs Stewart have been shut up since eight o'clock this morning. They won't let your Aunt Jane go in there, and this appears to distress her greatly. Boggle sends word he will see her here in the drawing-room instead. I hope to goodness your admirable Catherine will not come with him. No man has a chance against a woman like that, for she was born a rascally attorney! She and Boggle are a nice match! A nice pair to have domesticated in a house! Your uncle ought to have turned them out long ago."

"Oh, David!" said I, "he could not; poor man! he could not!"

"Well, well!" replied David softly, "I don't want to be hard upon him now, Sophy."

My husband begged me on no account to run away, but rather to stand and back his cross-examination, and be a witness on Aunt Jane's side,—"if your aunt begins to ramble, you can bring her back to the point better than I can. What on earth keeps her now!" he cried uneasily; "I thought she was following me. I hope she is not confusing her brains by the way." David was in a highly impatient state, and kept exclaiming, "By Jove! I wish I were well through this affair! most unpleasant one for me! By Jove! what's keeping her now?"

Aunt Jane did not appear for some little time. At last she came in, exclaiming, "Mr Boggle says he will follow me in a moment, for I met him in the hall, and he was talking to me, and I am afraid he is angry with me. I am afraid he is very angry, and oh dear! I hope I shall never have a lawsuit, because poor dear Edward had such a horror of my ever having a lawsuit; and poor dear Edward said just before his death, when he was ill, oh so very, very ill . . ."

"Mrs Sherbrook," cried David, interrupting her hastily, "I implore you to sit down and compose yourself." He eyed her black-bordered handkerchief nervously. "I implore you to be quite quiet, quite cool, Mrs Sherbrook. Merely say *yes* or *no* to Mr Boggle's questions, and keep very close to the point when you are telling your own story."

"I always do keep to the point," replied my aunt, with offended dignity; "but it is no good my saying anything now, because nobody believes me, and I don't think Mr Boggle believes me, and he used to . . ."

"The great point, Aunt Jane," said I, "is to tell exactly the same story in Mr Boggle's presence which you have told in his absence."

"Exactly the same!" interposed David—"exactly!"

"Repeat, Aunt Jane," I continued, "that Mr Boggle confessed to knowing nothing whatever about the £45,000 worth of securities hidden at my uncle's command in your own wardrobe, and also recall clearly"—I laid emphasis upon clearly—"recall clearly to his mind that he himself, with his own lips, declared to you had he known of the existence of these shares, my uncle's will should have made you residuary legatee."

"Yes, yes," exclaimed my aunt; "poor dear Edward always made me residuary legatee in all his wills, and he always . . ."

"Repeat to Mr Boggle," I said, going over my words again,

"that he himself declared had he known the existence of these shares, my uncle should have made you residuary legatee."

"But Edward never told Mr Boggle; never, Sophy! and Mr Boggle was afraid there would be no ready money for the heir who, very likely, Mr Boggle thinks, may have a lawsuit, so when Mr Boggle wrote out Edward's will he did not make me residuary legatee; and he says he would have done so if he had known there was so much ready money, because he would first have asked Edward to settle some of it on Gordon Sherbrook."

"Mr Boggle said this?" I exclaimed in a loud voice; "he allowed all this? Repeat every word of this to his face. Now, Aunt Jane, mind you repeat it—now mind you do. You must not forget; you must repeat it."

"It is all very fine for you, Sophy, to wish me to repeat things which make people angry," retorted my aunt; "but I don't want to have a lawsuit, and Mr Boggle says if I repeat that again he can bring an action for libel against me, and poor dear Edward . . ."

"Are they not Mr Boggle's own words?" I asked.

"But Mr Boggle," replied my aunt, "now says he did not say them, and he has just been talking to me, and he says I did not know what I said or anybody said to me after your uncle's death or before it either; and indeed, poor dear Edward! it was a dreadful shock to me, because he had so often attacks of his liver before, and really perhaps . . ."

David groaned aloud.

The door opened gently as if by stealth, and Mr Boggle walked in amongst us: he was perfectly unabashed and in full possession of his usual bland benevolence. David revived a little when he saw the attorney was alone.

"Oh, Mr Boggle! Mr Boggle!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, "you know it was not I who sent for you! It was Sophy and David Scott, and they want to make me repeat again what I have just told you out in the hall about Edward making me residuary legatee, though I tell Sophy you say I may have an action for libel, and I don't want to have a lawsuit at all; because poor dear Edward always had such a horror of my ever having a lawsuit, indeed he had!"

The attorney rubbed his hands, and smiling, said: "Mrs Sherbrook, I think you are labouring under some little misapprehension. I venture to perceive you have misunderstood me. As the widow of my late respected and lamented client, your words must have the greatest weight with me."

"Poor dear Edward! he would be glad to hear you say that,

Mr Boggle!" cried Aunt Jane, with tears, I verily believe, of gratitude. She was grateful like some child whose dreaded master does not strike, but unexpectedly approves.

"I am only too happy," continued Mr Boggle, with reassuring condescension,—"only too happy to give my utmost attention, my fullest consideration, to the remarks of any lady or gentleman."

"And more especially, sir, I hope, to your own," replied David, haughtily: he did not like being patronised by the attorney. "Mrs Sherbrook," he said, turning to my aunt, "pray repeat Mr Boggle's own words, and ask him if he remembers them."

Aunt Jane cast uncertain eyes from Boggle to David and from David to Boggle. The man of law and libel looked so benign that her terror was a little assuaged; besides, Mr Boggle himself urged her to speak. "What David wants me to remind you of, and what Sophy wants me to remind you of also, Mr Boggle," said Aunt Jane, nervously, "is that you said to me yesterday, when you told me I was not left residuary legatee in Edward's last will, and I told you I always was residuary legatee in all poor dear Edward's wills, and Edward always explained to me what that meant, so I know; you said to me, and we were standing by the round table at the time just near the big Bible Edward always . . ."

"When you were standing by this table, Mr Boggle said to you?" put in David, trying to keep her to the point.

"Where was I?" cried Aunt Jane; "if you interrupt me like that, David, I shall forget what I am saying."

"You were saying," I suggested, "that Mr Boggle said something to you about your not having been left residuary legatee in the will Uncle Sherbrook made just before his death."

"Ah! poor dear Edward!" began Aunt Jane; "he did not know anybody or anything, and he said . . ."

"But what did Mr Boggle say?" I insisted; "tell us, Aunt Jane, what Mr Boggle said."

"Mrs Scott," remarked the attorney, "is determined to keep you persistently to her own point, Mrs Sherbrook."

"Sophy always does interrupt and contradict everybody, Mr Boggle, except herself," cried my aunt pettishly, "and she never lets anybody talk without arguing."

David stared at her in speechless dismay.

I still persevered: "You were going to tell us, Aunt Jane," I continued, "what Mr Boggle said to you about the shares, and my uncle's . . ."

"If only you would stop arguing, Sophy," she exclaimed,

"I should remember exactly what I wanted to say, and I am sure so would Mr Boggle too. It is you who interrupt us, Sophy, and you really know nothing of business whatever, though you always tried to make Edward think you did."

"And Mrs Scott nearly succeeded," insinuated the attorney—"nearly, but not quite. Mr Sherbrook preferred trusting his property to other heirs."

"No," replied my aunt angrily—"no, Mr Boggle; Sophy never really made her uncle think she knew anything of business at all. It was not Sophy, it was I who always helped poor dear Edward to make his wills, and poor dear Edward always explained to me what residuary legatee meant, and he never explained it to Sophy, and Sophy knows nothing about it, and Edward never made Sophy residuary legatee, and he always made me in all his wills . . ."

"But not in his last will, Aunt Jane," said I artfully,—"not in his last! and that is the only one of any importance now."

"Don't argue, Sophy!" was the reply I got. "You don't know what you are arguing about! It was all a mistake, and Mr Boggle knows it, and told me it was, and poor dear Edward intended to make me residuary legatee, but Mr Boggle thought he had better not, because he thought there would be no ready money for Gordon-Sherbrook Stewart, and Mr Boggle said so, for Edward never told him he had nearly £50,000 worth of railway shares in the brown tin box in my wardrobe, and Edward made me promise not to tell Mr Boggle, so it was not really Mr Boggle's fault if he did not know anything about the shares, Sophy, as he had never read any of Edward's wills before; and when he was dying, poor dear Edward told me never, never to tell him."

The statement I had at last dragged from Aunt Jane was an accidental miracle. It raised David's spirits. David asked Mr Boggle to say if he had or had not made the remarks just repeated by Aunt Jane.

The attorney smiled: "I totally and entirely deny," he answered, "having made use of the words Mrs Sherbrook ascribes to me, in the manner she pretends. Mrs Sherbrook is perhaps a little inaccurate at times. Without intending it!" Though he smiled, if possible with increased benevolence, he spoke in a severe tone, ill suited to his physiognomy. Aunt Jane looked alarmed.

"Mr Boggle," asked David, "were you or were you not aware of the existence of these shares?"

"I do not admit your right to question me, sir," replied Boggle.

"You had better not, David!" cried Aunt Jane in a tremor; "you may have a lawsuit!"

"Although, sir," continued the attorney, "I do not admit your right to question me upon the subject of Mr Sherbrook's will, I have no objection to say that Mrs Sherbrook is labouring under a total misapprehension of existing facts. I should have thought, sir, it was hardly necessary for me to state that I possessed the late Mr Sherbrook's unreserved confidence, and was perfectly acquainted with the true state of his affairs."

I said, "This statement of yours, Mr Boggle, and Aunt Jane's are strangely at variance."

The attorney did not immediately reply. He eyed Aunt Jane in a way which appeared to make her extremely uncomfortable. She fidgeted as if she had two lawsuits, and not merely two eyes, fixed upon her. At length, when he did speak, he spoke slowly, and with cutting clearness. There could be no mistake in any word of his. He answered me, but looked at Aunt Jane. "Mrs Sherbrook," he said, "has twice informed me with her own lips that Mr Sherbrook's unexpected illness gave her a nervous shock, which, for the time being, completely incapacitated her from remembering either words or circumstances correctly. She moreover has frequently expressed the gravest doubts as to whether she and the late Mr Sherbrook knew what they were doing during the last few days of Mr Sherbrook's life."

"Indeed, indeed," cried Aunt Jane, before I could stop her—"indeed I did not know what I was saying or doing, for I felt poor dear Edward's illness dreadfully! dreadfully!"

My aunt provoked me, and I exclaimed in an angry manner, "For goodness' sake, Aunt Jane! don't try and make out you took leave of your senses!"

"The first paroxysm of unbearable grief," suggested Mr Boggle, "will not unfrequently obscure the clearest memory, and tend to create a state of mental paralysis in which misconception becomes not only natural, but unavoidable." His severity relaxed, and he added in a voice which feigned the softest emotion, "I can testify that no widow has ever felt her sore bereavement with more heart-rending sorrow than that experienced by Mrs Sherbrook."

Aunt Jane instantly began to cry. I think she partly wept with pleasure at hearing Mr Boggle do full justice to her tender heart. "Oh, Mr Boggle! Mr Boggle!" she sobbed; "you know I am a very feeling person, though Sophy says unkind, cross things, and does not think so, but when poor dear Sophia died (Sophy's poor dear mother), I felt it a great deal more than Sophy, and I am sure I shall never, never recover poor dear

Edward's death, never as long as I live! though poor dear Edward did not say good-bye to me, but thought my hand was Sophy's, because he was so queer! oh, so queer!"

"It is not uncommon at the last, Mrs Sherbrook," remarked Mr Boggle, "for illness to affect the mind."

"What?" cried I, addressing the attorney, "do you intend to prove that Uncle Sherbrook, being affected by paralysis, was in an unfit state to make a will?"

For a moment a look of fierce anger disturbed the man's mask, but it was quickly smoothed away by that habitual vile benevolence which I hated with an irritated hatred. It annoys me beyond endurance, not to see a man's mind worn openly in his face. I like a rogue to look a rogue, and not a smiling humbug hung about the head with the long white locks of St Peter and St Paul.

Mr Boggle did not speak until he had perfectly recovered his usual composure. He rubbed his hands and smiled, and said, in a condescending, fatherly sort of manner: "Young ladies make admirable women of business, owing to the brilliancy of their imagination. They imagine it is as easy to break a will as to make a will. Experience alone can teach a lady that a will is not invalid merely because her own name does not happen to be mentioned in it."

David had been perfectly silent for some time—he had abandoned the "argument" in despair! but at these words he fired up. Aunt Jane, seeing him redden with passion, prevented his speaking by crying out: "David is angry, Mr Boggle, and Sophy is angry, because of poor dear Edward's will. What shall I do? What shall I do if David hates me? for you know, Mr Boggle, Sophy hates me because of poor dear Edward's will, and Sophy told me so, Mr Boggle; she told me so. Sophy said she hated me, indeed she did!"

David was irritated beyond measure by Aunt Jane. "Mrs Sherbrook," he exclaimed angrily, "Sophy never said anything of the kind. Allow me to remark you have no right to state what is untrue. If you can stick to nothing else, you should stick to the truth."

Aunt Jane was aghast at this. "Untrue! untrue!" she wailed; "oh! poor dear Edward! if poor dear Edward could only hear you! Edward knew I never said anything untrue in all my life, and so does Mr Boggle. Mr Boggle knows it!"

A soothing compliment from Mr Boggle was the natural consequence of this appeal.

"Sophy knows she said she hated me! Sophy knows she did!"

"Yes, Aunt Jane," I confessed, to David's amazement; "but for a very different reason—a very different one." My aunt is one of those extraordinary people who can never stick to a point, unless it is some cross-cornered affair of their own making. Instead of forthwith diverging to poor dear Edward's illness, or to poor dear Edward's will, she cried—

"You see! you see! Sophy does not contradict me! though Sophy always does contradict me if she can, but Sophy knows she said she hated me, and Sophy did say it, and she hated me because of poor dear Edward's will."

"No, no, Aunt Jane—not for that reason; for another,"—but I said this more for form's sake than from any hope of being able to remove the wrong impression. Aunt Jane did not listen to me; she kept on repeating: "Sophy said she hated me! indeed she did! indeed she did! and you know, Mr Boggle, it was all because of poor dear Edward's will!"

"She would swear to this in a court of justice, Mr Scott," said the attorney, quietly; "she would also swear to the distracted state of her own mind at the time of Mr Sherbrook's illness and death. Under cross-examination, Mrs Sherbrook would swear to a great many important points—points well worth your consideration, Mr Scott, and not perhaps altogether unworthy of yours, Mrs Scott."

Whereupon Mr Boggle, with elaborate politeness, bade us a courteous good morning, and left us to ponder over his last pregnant remark.

Aunt Jane rose immediately, exclaiming huffily that David thought she was a liar: she wept, and declared she could not stay any longer in the room with a man capable of thinking she did not tell the truth.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"David thinks I am a liar! David, my own nephew by marriage, says I am a liar! What would poor dear Edward say if he only knew that David Scott thinks I am a liar, and says I am a liar!"

This wretched cross-cornered huff was the sole reward my unlucky husband got for trying, much against his will, to save Aunt Jane from ruin: some £300 a-year was nothing short of ruin to her!

David was of opinion that Mr Boggle may have known nothing about the flaw in Aunt Jane's marriage settlements, and that, notwithstanding his assertion to the contrary, he was certainly unacquainted with the true state of my uncle's fortune and affairs. "It would be ruin for him to confess his ignorance now," said David, "but had he known of these shares in time, I am sure he would have let your aunt have some of them. I expect Mrs Stewart was better informed than he. Boggle is quite sharp enough to understand this will must damage him in the county, when people get wind of the £45,000; for even now it is called Boggle's will, and not your uncle's. And then remember he had none of the personal spite against her he appears to have against you, Sophy."

David's idea was that Mr Boggle thought there would be no ready money for the heir, or rather for the lawsuit, which his own client Gordon-Sherbrook Stewart might have to defend against the next-of-kin, unless he made his client residuary legatee. "Attorneys," said David, "like to make sure there is money enough for a lawsuit. So Boggle just disobeyed Mr Sherbrook's injunctions, knowing he was robbing your aunt, but not knowing to what extent. He may have thought he was providing decently enough for her with her settlements, and the interest of the £10,000." The attorney being partly in the dark, David thought him only half a rogue. "I tell you, Sophy," he said, moralising for a wonder, "nearly all the mischief in the world comes through the half-honest and half-dishonest scamps. Boggle is like most rascals, just half a rogue!"

"Then if only half a rogue," said I, "he is an entire pious old hypocrite! and Satan is in all hypocrites, only it seems to me, David, he stands upright in the pious one! especially if the pious rascal happens to be an attorney."

"Or a banker, Sophy: you see," said David, continuing to moralise—"you see visible officious piety only furthers the intrigues of rascally attorneys and bankers, for it has nothing on earth to say to their real business. When they pray with you, you may be sure they are ready to ruin you. The devil, who was upright, Sophy, kneels down, and is taller than ever when he gets up again—it's his nature to grow on his knees. By Jove!" he cried, laughing, "but an action for libel would lie against me!"

There is no doubt it was quite in keeping with Uncle Sherbrook's pompously secretive nature, that he should not have placed unreserved confidence in his attorney, especially when

he had learned to distrust the man, and never intended any one to make his own will but himself. Clearly that last will was one wrenched from him in the fever and confusion of paralysis.

David thought Aunt Jane could make out an excellent case for herself and the Reverend James, and prove my uncle to have died intestate, he having been in an unfit state to make a will, if only, as David said, she were any one on earth but herself! But he declared she would ruin any case, and be convicted of perjury into the bargain. He vowed she would give every answer but the right one,—“and she is the only witness on her own side!” he said; “for that aspirating saint of hers she calls Snipkins has quite gone over to the other camp, and remembers nothing which could compromise either Mr Boggle or Mrs Stewart.”

So David considered Aunt Jane and her affairs to be in a perfectly hopeless muddle; and indeed they were! The natural confusion was, moreover, complicated each day, I might almost say each hour of each day, by my aunt’s marvellous capacity for getting under wrong impressions.

Happening one day to notice my ringless finger, she immediately inquired, with a scream—“Where is your diamond ring? Oh! Sophy, Sophy, where is your diamond ring?” I instinctively felt the Paris tale to be entirely unsuited to her mind; but David, foreseeing nothing, told her the whole truth after his usual frank manner, not mincing matters or excusing himself in the slightest degree. In fact, between ourselves, I think Aunt Jane’s horror of his almost incredible wickedness rather amused him, and he piled up the tragedy to make her stare. And she did stare! stare with both eyes at the gambler before her! David finished up his shocking tale by saying quite unnecessarily, “But there was no duel, Mrs Sherbrook.”

“Duel?” she screamed.

“No, there was none; but there might have been perhaps.”

“There might have been a duel!”

“I daresay; if Sophy’s ring had not put the pistols quite out of the question by giving me the five hundred then and there.”

“Pistols! pistols!” gasped my aunt.

It was really very naughty of David to amuse himself in this way, and he was punished for his giddiness. Aunt Jane soon grew under the impression that David had fought a duel in the purlieus of Paris, and with one of the lowest class of English outcasts. It was hard enough for me to prevent her from believing he had killed the man; gamblers were nearly always

murderers ! In all the stories Aunt Jane had ever heard or read, gamblers were always murderers, always !—“ for, Sophy, whatever you may think, I think duelling is murdering, and duelling and gambling go together, for a dreadful vice always leads into some fearful, horrible crime ; and I am sure I always told you David Scott was a very bad man for you to marry, and you married him quite against my better judgment, and against poor dear Edward’s ; and I know now what I did not know before, and that is why poor dear Edward never mentioned your name in his last will, for he always mentioned it in all his wills before, and it was because Edward thought David would gamble away all your money, and Edward knew David was gambling in Paris.” I clearly proved my uncle knew nothing of the kind ; that it was perfectly impossible for him to know it ; that he actually died on the very day my husband lost the £500. Yet—who can believe me ?—I only convinced Aunt Jane that I was arguing !

In due course of time the whole county heard Sophy Scott’s name had been omitted from old Mr Sherbrook’s will, because Mr Sherbrook had been informed that David Scott had gambled and lost a large sum of money within a week of his wedding. The whole county heard the story and believed it. Dullshire people implicitly believe it to this day. It has become a tradition in the land, and the tradition of a country district never changes. It was undoubtedly Aunt Jane herself who first gave the idea to Mrs Stewart and Mr Boggle, and they who blazed it to the county.

Notwithstanding all that had happened, Aunt Jane continued to tell Mr Boggle everything. The two were constantly having “chance” interviews, which I strongly suspected were contrived by the artful Boggle, for they were sure to take place “quite by accident,” and invariably when no third person was present. The attorney still retained, partly by flattery and old custom, and partly by fear, a powerful and most peculiar influence over my aunt.

David and I warned Aunt Jane against the danger of talking to Mr Boggle without a witness on her side, and she provoked David by replying that Sophy had prejudiced him against Mr Boggle, and would go to Mr Jones instead, though no one could tell by looking at Mr Jones’s pew on Sunday if he went to church or not ; but it was very dangerous to be prejudiced like Sophy against Mr Boggle, as Mr Boggle could bring a lawsuit against any one who was prejudiced against him, and that for her part, she never would say anything against him, because

Edward always had such a horror of her having a lawsuit. "And that was why your poor dear husband, in all his wills, always made you residuary legatee!" exclaimed David satirically. He was much irritated by my aunt.

"Hush!" whispered Aunt Jane, in fear and trembling. She looked nervously towards the door, and seeing it was open, shut it before she dared give an answer. She then exclaimed—"I know you say I am a liar! It is a shocking, shocking word, but it is a shocking thing, and you think I am a liar; I know you do, and you don't mind anything I say: all the same, I will tell you that you must not say anything more about my being left residuary legatee in all poor dear Edward's wills, and you really must not, for you will only make me have a lawsuit, and it is much safer not to talk about lawsuits or attorneys at all. Attorneys are very very dangerous people to talk about! very!" Aunt Jane drew down her upper lip and was silent. Great as the effort must have been to her, she remained so for three minutes and a half, and even then would not mention Mr Boggle's name again. We were amazed! At last, by dint of questioning, we discovered Aunt Jane to be sincerely convinced that if you speak well of an attorney, it may somehow or other cost you thirteen and sixpence, while if you speak ill of him, you are sure to have an action for libel! I was forced to admit, that for once Aunt Jane was under no very false impression.

"David, I admire that Boggle's talent," said I; "for undoubtedly it is admirable!"

But David was not in sufficiently good humour to admire anybody's cleverness. He was too intensely provoked by Aunt Jane. She had worried his pity to death, and had quite exhausted his patience. Being a kindly, sympathetic man, he had shown more patience than I had ever expected; but what man's patience could stand "David thinks I am a liar, and says I am a liar!" repeated often and illogically, and with tears, always with tears! If only the tears had been forgotten! David was not a man who could argue with a woman's tears, although Aunt Jane's were not to him what most women's were: they only puzzled and overpowered him. They made him helpless for the moment, and angry afterwards. My aunt's nervous habit of pouring out tears to the right and to the left upon subjects that were not tearful, deadened David to those tears of real grief which she shed from time to time, for there was true sorrow in the queer heart of the poor distracted and distracting widow.

I saw the grief; so, provoked as I was, my pity for Aunt Jane

did not die. There was a bond of sympathy between us which kept it living, for I too felt a grief within me hard to comfort, and our sorrow was the same: when my aunt did not irritate me beyond endurance, I almost loved her for remembering the poor dead man whom I remembered, but whom every one else had forgotten. David said he could not understand how I had ever become so deeply attached to Uncle Sherbrook. "Your uncle was a good man, and a thorough gentleman," he said, "but ponderous, and decidedly peculiar." David invariably told me exactly what he thought.

Had others mourned for Uncle Sherbrook a little more, I might indeed, perhaps, have mourned for him less. But he was so cruelly soon forsaken in his grave by the thoughts of all except Aunt Jane and me,—so entirely thrust aside—so clean forgotten in his own house, where he had been obeyed and feared and flattered,—that I grew to love him, when dead and out of sight, with a pitiful love more tender, maybe, than any I had felt for him in his lifetime. And then he was never "bilious" now, poor man! so I merely remembered his kindness and true affection. And Aunt Jane was like me; only she idealised "poor dear Edward" after a fashion of her own.

She turned his wisdom and infallibility into a sort of tearful and beautiful dogma. She quoted "poor dear Edward's" opinions on all subjects, and if any one disagreed with them, she wept. But the strange part of the matter was that, little by little she fell, unknown to herself, into the habit of ascribing all her own wrong impressions to "poor dear Edward"! My aunt quickly forgot her husband was a very silent man, who had not spoken as much in his lifetime as she spoke in a day. Uncle Sherbrook had certainly been the least garrulous of men; yet my aunt was doing her utmost to make a reputation of almost imbecile garrulity for him with posterity!

It is well the spirit of the dead should not linger here below, but soar to a higher world and nobler thoughts, for if worms should not devour a dead man's pride, what bitter humiliation would he not feel at the foolishly idealised, the distorted, unnatural reputation which, too often, is all he has left behind him in this world? All that remains of him, even in the memory of those who were so near to him, they might at least have known, and remembered him as he was.

Surely, thought I, ambition would die in many a heart, and the love of fame grow into cold indifference, if only we could see the wretch—the puling wretch!—who might survive us in

the name we gave our life and intellect, and sold, perhaps, our soul to make.

The immortality in this world we hear so much of, and for which men long as if it were a power that destroyed death and made their corpse something glorious, and no poor decaying body, would be to most of those to whom chance gave it but a farce, a cruel farce! far crueler than the tragedy of a forgotten life and a forgotten grave.

Of all the irritations with which Aunt Jane exasperated David, none was more calculated to drive him crazy than this her newly invented and quickly developing trick of ascribing everything she herself said to an idealised and infallible Edward. It positively enraged my husband to hear her cry plaintively, and then discover he himself was supposed to be "arguing" with "poor dear Edward"!

The outward manifestations of Aunt Jane's grief were altogether so odd that I must allow it was quite impossible for any man, even the most sympathetic, to be permanently touched by such peculiar sorrow. Aunt Jane imagined herself to express the most inconsolable part of her anguish by tying up her ringlets and hiding them under her widow's cap, like relics of a sacred romance. Her own thoughts were frequently occupied with her curls, so she often mentioned them, and, with an air of regretful, tearful piety, told us how much poor dear Edward had admired her hair. I think she came to look upon her ringlets as upon a holy joy belonging exclusively, by divine command, to the blessed state of matrimony; and she persuaded herself (I cannot exactly tell how) that the Bible had clearly ordained a widow's hair should be worn quite plain in front.

And then my aunt, somehow or other, mixed up her tender devotion to her late husband with the double elastic she used for stringing her jet necklace and mine. She found mine had been strung upon a single line, and I declare she spoke of that single elastic almost as if it were a kind of one-threaded, weak, half-hearted affliction. Her regrets for "poor dear Edward" were also dove-tailed into regrets for the embossed silver teapot with the bear's-head spout, which no longer appeared upon the breakfast-table or at afternoon tea. Aunt Jane had a personal affection for this teapot,—I can call the feeling by no other name. Mrs Stewart had taken possession of it in the name of Gordon-Sherbrook Stewart, and also of the four little dancing-bear muffineers, and indeed of all the plate. She would give us nothing but a few worn-out plated spoons and forks, and not enough of them. We had a brown kitchen teapot at breakfast,

and a kitchen mustard-pot and pepper-castor at luncheon and dinner. The ancestral punch-bowl and the tankard which had stood upon the sideboard ever since I knew Sherbrook Hall, had also disappeared. The absence of all these familiar friends was a real sorrow to Aunt Jane, and, I might add, a deep humiliation, for to her they were not only dear old friends, but ones with whom she had held a certain social position. When she no longer saw them around her, she seemed to feel degraded and fallen from her natural position as "Edward's wife." A woman like Aunt Jane can lose £45,000 cheerfully, because she will not at first grasp the fact, or understand a change of fortune, until experience has had time to teach her what it means ; but she cannot lose her silver teapot and her much-prized little knick-knacks without immediate tears. Their loss is visible and tangible, and goes straight home to her heart and pride.

I may seem to exaggerate, yet I speak literally the truth when I say that breakfast, luncheon, and dinner became a thrice-recurring anguish to my aunt. The moment our attempt to make Aunt Jane tell a clear story in Mr Boggle's presence had failed, Mrs Stewart relapsed into hardness and perfect safety, and callous indifference. She sat at the head of Gordon-Sherbrook's table, and paid no attention whatever to my aunt, nor indeed to anybody or anything, not even to the steeple. She was too preoccupied to talk between the courses ; her mind seemed to be taking a perpetual inventory, and her eyes looked as if they noted every nail in the wall. The admirable Catherine ate very quickly and voraciously, and disappeared in no time. The instant she left the room, the servants would leave also. Aunt Jane seemed afraid to ask them to stay. My aunt always was a little afraid of her servants, but now she looked like a disgraced culprit in their presence : you could see she was ashamed to give them an order, unless she could do so from the head of her own table.

Her humiliation and suffering were so real, that David would be touched, and would melt towards her and have patience with her, and have pity for a while. But the inevitable moment would come again when my aunt, as if possessed by a kind of fatality, would make herself an illogical, maddening irritation, and her grief, her heartfelt grief, a very funny sort of comedy, —no ! not exactly a comedy, for I have laughed and cried at it together, and have felt that, instead of a comedy, it was a tragedy that was being played before my eyes at Sherbrook Hall. It was a tragic sight to see the admirable Catherine's

coarse rapacity holding open revel, side by side with death, in my poor uncle's house ; and yet this grasping, clutching ghoul of unabashed human greed, sickening as it was, did not offend and pain me more than the sad tragedy of my aunt's helpless, abandoned state, because those by whom she was now forsaken, insulted, betrayed, had lived long years upon her kindness. It is no excuse for Mrs Stewart that she had never loved Aunt Jane, but had flattered her solely to advance her own plots and plans, although I daresay Mrs Stewart thinks no better excuse need ever be invented. I have noticed that clever intriguers look upon convenient fools as their rightful prey, and, if they be of the pious type, as prey given them by an approving Providence,—flies created under a special dispensation in order to be deceived into the spider's web.

I am not aware that Mrs Stewart has ever been ashamed of her conduct to Aunt Jane. There is far less self-reproach in this world than people will believe. The admirable Catherine has the art of dressing-up her actions, like her worldliness, very nicely in Christian charity. Everything she did at Sherbrook Hall was done in the name of her son : it was in his name that she seized Aunt Jane's jewels, thus making even rapacity beautiful by maternal devotion. It is no wonder she manages to think well of herself, and makes others think well of her too. Strangers can never much dislike this most plausible of women. It is when you come near enough to Mrs Stewart really to know her, that you hate her. David had grown to hate this woman. Her rapacity, her cheerful greediness, made him positively loathe her ; yet men like David do not often hate.

When, in the name of Gordon-Sherbrook Stewart, my uncle's residuary legatee, the admirable Catherine seized not only every jewel but every little trinket she found in Aunt Jane's and Uncle Sherbrook's rooms, David's indignation knew no bounds. He said Aunt Jane should instantly leave the house,—that she ought long ago to have left a house which was no more her own. He said rightly,—it was undignified for her to stay ; but he would not tell her so himself ! He made me tell her. He perfectly detested having a scene with Aunt Jane.

My task was no pleasant one,—it was even more painful than I had expected. I found, though Aunt Jane knew Sherbrook Hall was no longer hers, that she had not grasped what I might call the actual presence of the fact. The departure from her old home seemed to be a sort of hazy future to her, best not thought about—a kind of second mourning to be

considered when the first set of widow's weeds and caps was wearing out. The idea had actually never struck her that she ought, without an hour's delay, to leave the home "where Edward and I, Sophy, have lived together for twenty years,— and where, if they would only let me go into the study, I should feel exactly as if Edward were sitting beside me and writing to Mr Boggle or making his will, as he used to do,— and I should be quite happy, and think poor dear Edward was not dead at all."

My aunt's words were funny, but her grief was intense. Her sorrow unnerved me, and I had not the courage to press her immediate departure. I saw her distracted mind could not yet bear the new idea. Her old home, the old custom of routine, those daily, hourly habits she loved, and her old affection for "Edward," were so entwined together, they made but one feeling, and that one feeling made her life. Poor thing! she clung to her home weakly, passionately, as we cling to life. Suddenly to wrench her from the old ties would be cruel. Indeed, at her age, I thought the shock might kill her; so I had patience with her, and tried, for her sake, to contain a little longer the rage, and scorn, and loathing, I too felt towards Mrs Stewart.

But David had no patience left him. Aunt Jane's unwillingness to leave Sherbrook Hall seemed to him nothing but a contemptible want of dignity. He could see no excuse for it; he wondered how I could stay on another moment in the Stewarts' house; he wondered I did not leave Aunt Jane immediately to her own despicable imbecility.

But how could I leave Aunt Jane? It was then, for the first time, that we were both driven to look at my poor aunt's ruined state as it really was. She was literally without a penny of ready money, and the first instalment of her miserable pittance would not be due for several months.

For the present Aunt Jane could have no home but mine, and she had no friend but me; even her old servants had abandoned her. The Snipkins tribe had given warning, and taken service with Mrs Stewart. Snipkins herself had become "'ousekeeper in the new hestablishment, and general hover-looker of heverything, with nobody hallowed to interfere in my harrangements, Mrs Scott!"

Aunt Jane wept bitter tears over the loss of her maid, and constantly declared no other person would ever know her ways. "Snipkins has her Bible at her finger-ends, and she always gives me my collar before my cuffs; but Harriet often gives me my

cuffs before my collar. Snipkins knows all my little ways ! No one will ever know my little ways like Snipkins ! ” She seemed perfectly incapable of understanding she would not now be able to afford a lady’s-maid at all, or a large establishment, or an expensive house. In fact, the truth was so unpleasant that David and I could hardly realise it ourselves.

We did not like to realise it. David especially hated to see it as it was. He could not bear to think it had become our duty to offer Aunt Jane a home until she could get into a house of her own. However, he said, he might not so much object to my allowing her £200, £300, £400, £500, even £600 a-year, and helping her to furnish a house for herself. He was in a humour to consent to any arrangement sooner than run the risk of living under the same roof with my aunt, for he vowed if she lived in my house, he would live out of it. I could not blame him. I neither blamed nor approved. I was at my wits’ end, and did not know what to do. I could not find it in my heart to be hard and cruel, in her need, to Uncle Sherbrook’s widow. Had I loved Aunt Jane better, I might perhaps have left her with more ease of conscience; but when we cannot pay a debt with real gratitude, we feel bound in honour to be kind in our actions—to be more unselfish and generous than if love were prompting us. It is like paying a man in money only: we feel called upon to pay him double what we should pay our friend.

I said all this to David, and I perceived that, like the rest of the world, he thought the plain woman admirably suited to the duties of life. “ You can stand your aunt, Sophy,” he said; “ you have the knack of being able to put up with irritating people, so it is quite the right thing for you to stay on here as long as your aunt stays, and take care of her, for the Lord knows she can’t take care of herself.”

David moreover said that, upon reflection, he quite agreed with me in thinking Aunt Jane ought to find a home in our house “ till she gets a house of her own, Sophy. I would not for the world she were turned from our house like a homeless beggar ! Take her in, by all means,” he exclaimed; “ you can stand her, Sophy ! but I can’t; so I am off to Scotland this very night.” And he vowed he would go raving mad if he stayed another hour at Sherbrook Hall. “ With your Aunt Jane on the one hand, and Mrs Stewart on the other, I am pretty far gone as it is ! ”

There could be no doubt this was the best arrangement possible under our peculiar circumstances, yet I was very loath

to acknowledge it. I could hardly bring myself to part from David. We had only been married a month! I was filled with a vague dread, with a kind of superstitious terror that separation would break the spell of our happiness. David pooh-poohed the notion, called it stuff and nonsense, and declared if I did not let him go to Scotland, I should have to send him into a lunatic asylum instead.

In the fear and pain of parting from him, I forgot Aunt Jane and all I owed her: so that I were with my husband, I no longer cared if she were left alone. To David's amazement, and indeed dismay, I implored him to take me with him.

I then discovered I must have drawn a more vivid picture of Aunt Jané's forsaken state, and must have painted selfish ingratitude in blacker hues, than I had imagined. We are most eloquent when we try to over-persuade ourselves as well as others! and in talking to David, it was myself as well as he I had tried to move. I found I had entirely succeeded in convincing him I should be nothing short of an unnatural monster if I forsook Aunt Jane in her powerless ruin and her sorrow. He repeated to me what I had said to him, and it was impossible for me to contradict my own words—because they were my own!

David ended by saying much what he had said before. "Your aunt cannot be left alone with a set of harpies. It would be a disgrace to us both if we abandoned her, and I quite see we must offer her a home until she gets into a house of her own. By Jove! I should stay with her myself if I could stand her! but I can't stand her, Sophy, and you can—you can stand all sorts of peculiar people. I declare you were quite fond of your uncle,—by Jove, you were! You must stay. It is your duty to stay, and I shall be back again as soon as ever you have put your aunt into a house of her own. When I am bidding her good-bye, I will tell her she must leave Sherbrook immediately; but I won't tell her till the trap is at the door, not I! for she will be sure to weep abundantly, and say—I ought not to go shooting while I am in deep mourning! That's the point she will fix on! I would bet ten to one she will fix on that! though all the world knows a man is never considered to be in too deep mourning to amuse himself. It is quite different with a lady—quite! So I declare, Sophy, it is just as well you are staying on here, if only for the look of the thing. People would be scandalised if you went travelling and visiting about with me so soon after your uncle's death. By Jove, they would!"

David was packed up and ready to start before Aunt Jane could be brought to believe he had any intention of going. I no longer tried to keep him. I believed it was best for him to go, and best for me to stay ; still I could not say good-bye to him without tears. We had only been married a month !

When he saw me cry, he was moved to sympathy, and vowed he would not leave me. He called himself a wretch for leaving me. There was the ring of true affection in the relenting love he showed me.

I could have kept him then had I willed it, but I was ashamed of my own weakness. My heart grieved to think my selfish tears should keep poor David, and doom him to be maddened by Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart.

So I made him go, and showed him I could say good-bye and not weep again. His melting kindness had filled me with a joy which let me smile to him as he drove away.

When David was gone and far from me, I continued to see him as he looked to me in the warmth of our last embrace. I never saw him grow cold towards me, or become forgetful of my love.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Aunt Jane's state of feeling towards Mrs Stewart was strange indeed. She complained to me of Catherine's conduct, she bewailed it, she cried over it. I heartily agreed in condemning it. She forthwith praised the admirable Catherine—her labour in the Lord's vineyard, her tatting, her sound doctrine,—“so different from yours, Sophy !”—her indefatigable, energetic nature. “Catherine works like a devoted slave, and she says it is a great bother taking this inventory, but she does it all for Gordon-Sherbrook's sake, because it seems he is very particular, and would be very angry if a single spoon were lost, though it might only be a tea-spoon, and I had no idea till Catherine told me that Gordon-Sherbrook was so particular about the spoons, and about everything, and I am sure Catherine would give me a great many things, only for Gordon-Sherbrook ; but I think perhaps she will ask Gordon-Sherbrook to let me have the tea-pot with the bear's-head spout, and you may say what you like, Sophy, I know Catherine will ask him. I know she will ! She is not like you, Sophy, who will never ask for anything.

I had twice refused to beg this teapot for Aunt Jane ; I now saw she was determined to ask for it herself. She declared it was the only teapot in the whole world which made really good tea. Her love for it and her desire to have it were so strong, that I spoke to a deaf person when I tried to make her understand the intense humiliation there would be for her in asking a gift of Mrs Stewart. I told her, too, she would ask in vain —but I was mistaken.

Next day I met my aunt crossing the lobby with the beloved teapot held between both hands. She was in an odd state of joy and triumph, and cried out to me—"I told you, Sophy, I knew Catherine would let me have the teapot with the bear's-head spout, but you always contradict everybody, though the instant I asked her, Catherine immediately said she was quite sure Gordon-Sherbrook would give me my own teapot, as I was so very, very much attached to it, and that if he objected afterwards, Catherine said she would buy him a new one, for that he could not be as fond of the bear's-head spout as I was ; and Catherine quite understood my affection, and was not at all angry with me, for Catherine does not hate me, Sophy, because of poor dear Edward's will. Catherine really is a most excellent, Christian-minded, indefatigable creature ! and she says she knows Gordon-Sherbrook has the Lord's blessing, and will multiply the talent intrusted to his care ; and Catherine says she would like to give me the four dancing-bear muffineers, but she cannot give away anything more belonging to Gordon-Sherbrook."

My pride blushed for Aunt Jane. I felt acute pain on her account, and, belonging to her as I did, it was with a deep sense of shame that I next met Mrs Stewart. For a wonder, I happened to find myself alone with the admirable Catherine. I think she understood my humiliation, and liked it : she fixed her clear-sighted eye upon me,—"Sophy," she said, "you are not pleased Mrs Sherbrook should have begged this piece of plate from me ; and you are surprised I gave it to her." I noticed she did not mention Gordon-Sherbrook's name, but said, "I gave it to her."

"Mrs Stewart," I replied, "we have never mystified each other with insincere speeches."

"True enough, Sophy ! And should you like to know why I gave it to her ?" she asked.

I said that I would. "You had weighed it," I added, "and you knew its value."

"I gave it to her, Sophy," she answered quietly, "because I

intend your aunt to speak well of me when she leaves this house: I do not intend you to have all the talk to yourself. I mean her to contradict your story to your face; so perhaps, Sophy, you may find it wiser to hold your tongue. I have told you the exact truth."

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart is certainly no ordinary person, for she is a liar who can tell the truth, and a hypocrite who can be sincere. The fact is, she is not a hypocrite by taste and instinct, only by calculation. She is a domineering, ordering woman, who fawns on no one except for the sake of some clearly defined interest of her own. She is not a liar where the truth can serve as well—still less where it serves better.

The words I have just repeated were the only ones which passed directly between Mrs Stewart and me until the night before I left Sherbrook Hall.

I hardly saw the admirable Catherine except at meals. She spent most mornings shut up with Mr Boggle in the study, and the rest of her time she was busy taking that everlasting inventory. She even went down into the stable for a day or two, and took an exhaustive inventory there, which somehow or other resulted in Robert's dismissal. She and Robert had never quite hit it off together; and Robert was not a Snipkins!

I do not think I exaggerate in saying that Aunt Jane's mind was appalled by the dismissal of Robert. I fancy Robert had always seemed more like a master than a servant to her—he had appeared to drive the bay mare at his own pace by an unquestioned right.

When Mrs Stewart sent Robert away, Aunt Jane felt her to be all-powerful: she felt that even in "poor dear Edward's" lifetime her own power had never reached such a height as this. She spoke of "Catherine" with a sort of awe. She feared her. My aunt excited my most intense contempt by declaring she never would do anything which ever could make Catherine really angry. I had asked her to send for James Sherbrook, or else to go and see him and Mary and the children, and bid them all good-bye before she left, and this was her answer—"Catherine would not like it! Catherine would not let James come into the house! I am sure she would not! and I never will do anything, Sophy, which could ever make Catherine really angry."

When she said this, I turned from her in uncontrollable disgust. I walked straight out of the house off to the Rectory. I confess as I went along that I felt keen pleasure in knowing

I was doing the one thing Mrs Stewart would most dislike me to do.

My visit to the rectory moved me—it gave me both pleasure and great pain. I had always been fond of James Sherbrook, yet I had liked and pitied rather than respected him. I had thought him—what no doubt he is—a weak man, too easily led. But now I felt he had the delicacy, the dignity of a high-bred gentleman, and the kindly goodness of a really religious man, and I respected him.

He asked no question it might be awkward for me to answer; he made no allusion to the last time we had met; he never mentioned my uncle's will. He betrayed no disappointment, no pique, but he looked broken down, like a man who had received a shock. His look grieved me. He asked most kindly for Aunt Jane, and offered to go and see her and read to her. Mary seemed astonished at my bungling, excusing refusal, but the kind Rector tried to make even my refusal easy.

The simple Mary appeared to understand nothing. I do not think Uncle Sherbrook's will had been any surprise or disappointment to her. I quite think she had never realised her husband was the natural heir, or indeed had never cast a thought upon such hazy distances as future prospects. After the sight of Mrs Stewart's hawk-eyed rapacity, it pleased me to behold such guilelessness. There was a beauty, an illusion about it,—a sort of poetry which touched me, although I was forced to admit had Mary been cleverer, she could not have been so blind. I knew it was partly the total absence of talent which enabled the present hour to shut out those future days when her boys could have no chance in life because they had no money.

I do not believe the Rector was more worldly than she, but he was cleverer, so the anxieties of their two lives and of their children's were his. I saw this, and I felt for him.

His careworn face haunted me after I had left the rectory. I realised intensely the cruel injustice of my uncle's will. I hoped some one might soon die and leave the poor clergyman a fortune, for I knew if I died myself I should now leave my money to David. During my walk homewards I did my best to invent expectations for James Sherbrook. I bethought myself of Jack Jones.

I rested sitting upon the milestone just outside the village, and tried hard to weave a hope for the Rector's children. It was difficult for me to do so, because I am convinced hardly any one who wants money gets it: the poor are heirs to poverty.

I was startled from my thoughts by the near approach, by the actual presence, of Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. She came striding along the middle of the road, dressed in an ulster and a pot hat, with two pugs at her heels, a dog-whip in one hand, and some kind of large parcel under one arm. Her high-stepping action was remarkable. She covered no end of ground,—in a stride she was before me. She stopped short. Her eye-glass was in her eye. “Oh, Sophy!” she said.

“Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone,” said I, getting up.

There was a dead stop between us—her short manner invariably silenced me. She appeared to rummage her brain for another remark. With an effort and a start it came at last. “Taking worsted-work to the rectory!” she remarked.

“Unsound upholstery? Very High Church?” I inquired.

“You’re so awfully Low, Sophy! awfully! No patience with you!” she exclaimed; “all comes of your being shut up with a pack of dowdy old Thunderbore Methodists! Soon change if you went into society! Soon find no one worth knowing is Low Church. Low Church shocking bad form nowadays!” This was said with that air of self-satisfied conceit with which fashion speaks of the unfashionable. “Believe me, Sophy, it quite cuts a young lady out of society to have the views of a Low Church dowdy. Might as well talk like your maiden great-aunt, or wear one of last year’s gowns!”

I did not know whether to be more surprised at the length or at the social theology of this speech. I was astonished at both! Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone did not seem to have another word left her. She whistled to the pugs, cracked the dog-whip, gave me one nod of her head, and was in motion, shoulders, hips, and all. Suddenly she wheeled right-about-left, and held out her hand. “Good-bye, Sophy,” she cried; “hear you are going to leave the county immediately. Won’t see you again before you go! Good-bye! Daresay we will meet again somewhere some day?” Jumping Georgy was in marching trim, but wheeled round a second time, exclaiming, “Forgot your aunt! Hear she’s off too! Say good-bye to her for me.”

“No, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone!” I said—and she could not have said it more abruptly with her own lips—“no, I won’t!”

She put down her eye-glass; she put it up; she put it down; she put it up; she fixed it upon me, and looked as much surprised by my short, rude answer as if she herself had been the most graciously polite lady in Europe. She examined me curiously. At last she said—“Don’t understand you, Sophy!”

“Do you not understand that you might come yourself, Mrs

Rigardy-Wrenstone," I replied, "aud bid Aunt Jane good-bye ? A visit from you," I added, more softly, "would be an event to her, and so would excite her mind, and turn it a little from her great unhappiness."

Jumping Georgy reflected, hesitated, and then exclaimed—"Should not know what to say to her ! Never much cared for Mr Sherbrook !" She spoke the exact truth. I was sure of it. I saw that instinct told her she had not enough imagination to conceive feelings she could not share. I did her the credit to believe that could she have imagined Aunt Jane's sorrow, she would have gone to her and sympathised with her. She repeated—"Would not know what to say !" She attempted to make no other excuse, but remarked—"Rigardy went to the funeral, and invited the whole county, and did all that was right and proper, you know."

From her manner she evidently expected me to reply—"So kind of your husband !" Yet I said nothing; not that I thought it unkind of Rigardy-Wrenstone, but I felt he had done so principally from the love of being first, no matter where. I knew him to have been born a master of the ceremonies, with a taste for doing the honours and issuing invitations to county magnates and grandes. I firmly held my tongue. I was as sincere with Jumping Georgy as she was with me. Finding I gave her no answer, she whistled to the pugs and marched on.

I was far from disliking Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, though she could alarm and silence me. I had seen so much humbug in my life, that I liked her none the worse, but the better, for not feigning to have what she really had not. The pity lay in her not having imagination of either heart or mind.

It was not her fault that she wanted imagination. She had been created without it, so why blame her when nature had not given it to her ? I did not blame her. I only thought it a pity imagination for the feelings and individuality of others should ever be forgotten in a good woman's composition. Thus thinking, I watched Jumping Georgy striding along. As my eyes followed her, I became convinced this nondescript person is not a woman at all. Jumping Georgy is a sincere and perfectly well-behaved young man, who neither drinks, smokes, nor gambles. Jumping Georgy sold out of the army on his marriage, but still holds military rank, retaining also for life the short manner of a commanding officer.

It was late in the afternoon when I returned to Sherbrook from my visit to the rectory. To my surprise, I found Mrs

Stewart sitting with Aunt Jane in the drawing-room. The indefatigable Catherine had never sat there since my uncle's death. She had been too fully occupied elsewhere all day long, and every day—even upon the blessed Sabbath, though doubtless it was only an inventory of Dr MacShaw's works which this strict Sabbatarian took upon the seventh day.

Mrs Stewart was resting in Uncle Sherbrook's arm-chair, with her feet cocked up on the lower rim of the calico stool. She was tatting leisurely, and counting her loops at her ease. It was years since I had seen her tatt so quietly.

"Poor, dear Catherine, she has finished that bothersome inventory!" cried Aunt Jane, quite forgetting to ask where I had been; "poor, dear, excellent, indefatigable creature! Congratulate her, Sophy; congratulate her!"

I said nothing, and Catherine took no notice of my presence, but continued tatting as before, neither faster nor slower.

At dinner she tatted between the courses, and was in no hurry to leave the table. She sat on, and entertained Aunt Jane with edifying tales of the Christian Cossack. We had this same Cossack off and on during the evening, and a tract from the handbag as well.

The kindness, the agreeability, the soundness, the thoughtfulness, the excellence of that poor, dear, Christian-minded, indefatigable creature, Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart, enraptured my aunt. Aunt Jane rated Catherine's civility thus highly, because it was such a long time since this lady had gone to the trouble of talking to her, or of having the ordinary good manners of society towards her. It is a fact in life—a common truism—that nine people out of ten prize the occasional unexpected civility of a person habitually neglectful and rude, twice as much as they do the unvarying kindness of one whom they can always count upon, and even snub if they please.

The climax of excellence was reached when Catherine lighted Aunt Jane's bedroom candle, and carried it up-stairs herself. She had never done this since Uncle Sherbrook's death. She used to do it regularly before. I had done it every evening in her stead, as a matter of course, but naturally enough had never received any thanks; yet Aunt Jane could not now find words to express her inordinate gratitude and her fears lest dear Catherine might have dropped some grease upon her gown!

By Mrs Stewart's own order, Snipkins was in waiting to undress my aunt.

"Good-night!" exclaimed Aunt Jane, embracing her Catherine with warm gratitude; "God bless you for being kind to

me! Poor dear Edward would be glad to know you are kind to me. God bless you, Catherine!" There was something touching in the way my unfortunate aunt said these words. They made Snipkins look a little ashamed, I thought, and very much astonished.

Mrs Stewart had no look but that of self-satisfied success. The orthodox intriguer, who for many years has mixed up Providence successfully in all her little arrangements, I believe really does become convinced she has the blessing of the Almighty upon her plots and plans. It is a strange state of mind, but conscience dies surely in the self-righteous woman who learns to think she can do no successful wrong. The utmost she can imagine is that others may not consider her altogether in the right, so she takes precautions to look well in their sight, if they are people whose good opinion is of marketable value. Otherwise she takes none.

With a second embrace and another "God bless you!" my aunt and her Catherine parted for the night; and I went my way to my own room, wondering what new little plan Mrs Stewart could have in her head,—for I felt perfectly certain this sudden effort of civility towards my aunt was no trouble taken in vain.

The puzzle was not fated to be long an unravelled mystery. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was following me, and I found her in my room almost at the same moment with myself. "You must be surprised to see me here, and at this hour of the night," she said in a pleased, elated sort of manner; "but you will be still more surprised, Sophy, when you hear what I have to say."

"No, Mrs Stewart," I replied; "nothing you could ever do or say would surprise me. The only certainty I ever feel about you is, that you have certainly got some unlooked-for little arrangement or design on hand."

This speech of mine did not offend Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart; on the contrary, I think it actually pleased her. There are two distinct races of clever, intriguing women. She is of the species who like to be thought even more cunning and deeper than they are; for in her estimation, talent and occult management are one and the same thing.

"Very well, Sophy," she exclaimed; "delighted to hear you are prepared for everything! I suppose you are all packed up and quite ready to leave this to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?" I cried; and notwithstanding all I had just said, I am sure I looked what I really was, greatly astonished.

Mrs Stewart was in high glee. "For a person," she remarked, "who cannot be astonished at anything, I think you look just a little surprised."

"Indeed," I answered, "I spoke rashly, for you have surprised me."

"I expect a letter from Malta to-morrow morning," continued Mrs Stewart; "and unless it gives better news of Gordon-Sherbrook, I am off myself to-morrow night."

"The letter," said I, "will certainly come, and the bad news also, for the inventory is finished. You have the knack of convenient accidents, Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart."

She received this remark without comment or visible annoyance. My good opinion was no longer of any marketable value whatever, so she then and there unfolded the whole of her little plan to me. There was no beating about the bush. She stated her intentions clearly and firmly. She had every little detail beautifully arranged beforehand. Aunt Jane was to leave by the twelve-o'clock train from Vottingham, and Mr Boggle was to tell her she must go. "He can easily make her believe it would be illegal for her to remain here any longer. She believes in him, and she is mortally afraid of him. The more he terrifies her the better, for the quieter she will go. And go she must! Snipkins has packed up all her clothes without her knowledge. Snipkins has been packing them for the last week."

"The shock of this sudden wrench may kill my poor aunt," said I.

"Not a bit of it," cried Mrs Stewart—"not a bit of it. She will just cry and scream, but nobody ever died of crying." She looked angry. I had at last displeased her. "Sophy," she added, "had Mrs Sherbrook left my son's house in proper time, she would not have waited until she received her notice to quit."

These words brought all the blood in my veins into my cheeks, to blush there for Aunt Jane. "Have pity on my aunt's weakness, Mrs Stewart," was all I could say; "it is hard for her to leave her home. She is old; she is helpless; sorrow has overpowered the little mind and courage she ever had. She has not nerve to bear fresh grief."

Mrs Stewart's hard words and harder manner had revived the pity and sympathy for Aunt Jane which had almost died in my own heart. I actually pleaded my aunt's cause with Mrs Stewart. I begged a reprieve for her, so that she might get accustomed to the idea of leaving—so that the shock might

not quite unhinge her mind. I begged three days more for her; I begged two; I begged one; but I could not even get an hour.

“Mrs Sherbrook must leave to-morrow morning,” said Mrs Stewart, decidedly; “she must and shall leave, because I am going myself in the afternoon, and I am determined not to let her remain one single hour in this house behind me. Some of the plate might be missing if I did, and then I should have some unpleasant lawsuit with her afterwards.”

“You treat her like a thief, and in the house which so long was her own,” said I, indignantly.

“Yes,” said Mrs Stewart, quietly; “I do. Good-night, Sophy. I have said all I want to say.”

“Good-night, Mrs Stewart, and the Lord bless you for being so kind to my poor aunt, now that my uncle is dead. The Lord bless you, Mrs Stewart!”

I thought myself cutting and satirical when I said this, but the admirable Catherine only smiled, as if it gave her positive pleasure to recall Aunt Jane’s words. There seemed to be no shame for her in their guileless trust.

CHAPTER XL.

“Boggle has managed her beautifully!” cried Mrs Stewart, with frisky delight; “no one could have been cleverer or more judicious than he! Your aunt is as quiet as a child, and is letting herself be dressed by Snipkins in the hall. She does not even want to walk up-stairs again, or fuss about in any way. I believe she fancies one of her legs is stiff, and so much the better! If we are only quick now, we shall get her off before the crying fit comes on. It is sure to come sooner or later. Lock up your trunk this instant, Sophy. The carriage is actually at the door, and Thomas and William are waiting to take down the luggage.” And Mrs Stewart tripped away cheerfully to put on her own bonnet and cloak—for, much against my will, she had firmly determined to accompany us to the station, and see the very last of us. She would come; nothing could prevent her.

I found my aunt seated in the hall upon one of the crested oak chairs. She was dressed, and Snipkins had just given her

her gloves. I saw her hands were trembling, so that she could not put them on. Her head was shaking too. She seemed irritated at not being able to put on the gloves easily. Snipkins helped her, and pulled them on and buttoned them. Aunt Jane then sat staring at her hands, as if puzzled to see the gloves. She was silent, except to ask every few minutes—“When do you say we are going, Snipkins?”

“This moment, ma’am ; the carriage is at the door.”

“Oh !” said Aunt Jane, and her brow knitted, as if it were an effort to grasp the meaning of Snipkins’s answer. Then again, in another minute, “When are we going ? When are we going, Snipkins ?”

“The carriage is at the door, ma’am. You are going now.”

“Oh !” repeated my aunt, and her face grew calmer ; but the troubled expression soon returned, and the question, “Are we going away to-day, Snipkins ? When are we going away ?”

“O Lor’, ma’am ! Lor’ !” cried the maid ; “Hi’ve told you hover and hover hagain, and you don’t seem to understand, like.”

“Tell me again, Snipkins,” said my poor aunt ; “I won’t ask you any more questions, but tell me again !”

“You are going now, ma’am, you are going now ! The carriage is at the door.” Snipkins did not speak crossly ; on the contrary. I looked at her with surprise, for I thought there was pity in her voice.

“Snipkins,” cried my aunt, after a moment’s pause,—“Snipkins, what did you say about the carriage ?”

At this Snipkins seemed awestruck. She clasped her hands, and exclaimed, “My poor lady ! my poor lady !” This exclamation appeared to bother Aunt Jane’s troubled mind : the puzzle of it irritated her exceedingly, and turning to me, she said, in a tone of querulous provocation, “Snipkins won’t answer me when I speak to her. Sophy, what did she say about the carriage ?”

“She told you the carriage is here ;” and I drew near to my aunt, and put my arm around her. “Come, come, Aunt Jane,” I said, coaxingly ; “come, dear, we are going for a drive.”

“A drive ?” she repeated—“a drive ?” And she bothered over the idea, as if it clashed with some other vague notion in her mind.

“Come !” said I, helping her to rise. I forced a smile, and added, “Aunt Jane, you know we must not keep the horses waiting,—the bay mare will catch cold.”

The familiar words, those old, old acquaintances, found their

way to her understanding. She immediately rose in excited haste, and crossed the hall, leaning her whole weight heavily upon my arm. I perceived with a pity which drowned every other regretful, grieving thought within me, that she was just a little paralysed—she dragged one leg: this, then, was the stiff leg the admirable Catherine had mentioned so cheerfully! I supposed my aunt must herself have spoken of it to Mrs Stewart, and that she must therefore have felt her own helplessness. If this had been so once, she had now forgotten it. Her weakness did not trouble her. She appeared not even to be aware of it, but tried to hurry on, exclaiming that Robert would be annoyed if the bay mare caught cold.

When Snipkins heard my aunt speak of Robert, as if he had never gone away, and were still her own coachman, I think she considered her mistress to be in a state of appalling, hopeless lunacy. To forget Robert's dismissal, was of all lapses of memory the one best calculated forcibly to impress the lady's-maid's imagination; and it is a fact that something very like remorse was written on the woman's frightened face. This look prompted me to say, "Snipkins, you have helped to bring about this misery."

"Why are you speaking to Snipkins?" asked Aunt Jane, petulantly. "She is very cross, and won't answer me when I speak to her." My aunt was helped into the carriage, repeating, "I won't speak to Snipkins! I won't speak to her! Tell her to go away, Sophy. I can't understand her. She irritates me! she irritates me! Tell her to go away, Sophy. Robert!" she cried, "drive on! drive on!" But the new coachman had received other orders, and did not move.

I explained to Aunt Jane that we were waiting for Mrs Stewart; and she surprised me by getting very angry, and declaring over and over again that Catherine was always late, and always kept her waiting, and that she could not bear to wait,—she could not bear it! The only clear consciousness my aunt now seemed to have, was an overpowering desire to start off and be gone. Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart was not long in coming, yet Aunt Jane had time to work herself into quite a passion—she even began to reproach Catherine, and in unmeasured language. But the best of women was not going to put up with any nonsense of this sort! In one instant she had silenced Aunt Jane,—more by her voice and eye, it is true, than by her actual words.

Snipkins had followed Mrs Stewart to the carriage-door, and I imagined, by her Christian lady's express command. Perhaps

the admirable Catherine did not consider it looked well for George and Thomas and William to see Aunt Jane part from her confidential maid in anger, for I fancied that Mrs Stewart had not yet quite shaken off the fear of a possible lawsuit, and to a person fearing a family lawsuit, servants' evidence is of nervous importance—it is so apt to tell the wrong way.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart pressed Aunt Jane's arm, and said firmly, "Shake hands with Snipkins." My aunt obeyed mechanically, and we drove on.

Aunt Jane had left her home for ever!

She was silent, and her knitted brow betokened the effort she made to understand the bewilderment she was conscious of: at length she asked, wonderingly, what could have made Snipkins cry?

"Snipkins is an idiot!" muttered Mrs Stewart, irritably. My aunt was bewildered and silent again. Then shortly, with suddenly renewed excitement, she repeated the former question—"Catherine, why was Snipkins crying?"

"Because you are going away from her, Mrs Sherbrook. Poor Snipkins! She is very soft-hearted!"

"Oh, Catherine! Catherine!" cried my aunt, and a look of abject fear crossed her face; "where, where are you taking me?"

"I am not taking you anywhere, Mrs Sherbrook," replied Catherine, testily; "you are going of your own accord. You are going to London."

I heard my aunt say over to herself, "London? Yes; I am going to London." Yet in no time, the idea she had grasped melted in her mind, and she asked again anxiously, "Where am I going, Catherine?"

I quite dreaded Mrs Stewart's reply. I expected she would snub my poor aunt unmercifully, for teasing her so soon again with a question she had only just had the trouble of answering. What then was my surprise to see her face light up, not with anger, but with a look of cheerful satisfaction! She nodded her head at me, as much as to say—I see we shall have no trouble with her; she is just muddled enough to make things easy. And laughing, she exclaimed, "My dear Mrs Sherbrook, where are your brains? Why, I have only just told you that you are going to London, and you have forgotten it already!"

"I remember now, I remember," said my aunt. Her Catherine's cheerful enjoyment of the present hour seemed to allay her undefined anxiety, and she listened tranquilly, while Mrs Stewart dilated on the beauty of the weather, and on the autumn

tints, and on the fine appearance of the beeches near the avenue gate. The best of women surveyed the whole demesne with the eye of pleased possession—although, I reflected, the place does not yet belong to her.

My aunt remained quiet and speechless until the last gate of her old home had closed behind her, and then she grew strangely excited. Her tearless eyes stared blankly from her troubled face; her head trembled violently; she spoke oddly, with the thick utterance of a dried-up tongue. "Catherine," she cried, "where am I going? I can't remember! I can't remember!"

Mrs Stewart told her she was going to London, but the answer no more appeased her agitation. The question was again repeated, and again. Really this was too much of a good thing! The admirable Catherine waxed impatient, and spoke harshly; still the question was repeated, though nervously, almost with terror. "Catherine, Catherine, where am I going?" My aunt raised her trembling hands, and implored Mrs Stewart to tell her—"Be kind to me, Catherine, and tell me! tell me! Tell me this once, because I can't remember."

This recurring annoyance was no joke. There must be an end to it, for Mrs Stewart could stand it no longer! So in her bitterest tone of voice, she told my aunt to hold her tongue, and not to worry any more. The sound of Catherine's hard words and voice effectually silenced Aunt Jane. By degrees she lapsed into an abject and imbecile sort of stupefied feebleness. The trembling of her head and hand increased. Her fallen jaw gave her a silly look, and she drizzled a little; she seemed nervously aware of this sad childish shame; it appeared to irritate her; she became engrossed by it, and used her handkerchief constantly.

Oh! the weakness of her debased state. Oh! the pitiful weakness of it. It was then that I loved Aunt Jane as I had never loved her before—as I never could have loved her, had I not seen her in that debasing sort of grief which appeals to our love and to our mercy (if we have any in our soul!), with that same kind of agonising eloquence with which a friend-abandoned wretch from some abyss of human misery appeals to the mercy and the love of God.

Only once, and for a moment, did my aunt's excitement return. I felt her shaking hand upon my knee, and heard her whisper timidly, "Where are we going, Sophy?"

"You are coming with me, Aunt Jane," I replied; "we are going home together." And I kept the trembling hand in

mine. The gentle pressure soothed my aunt ; the acquiescing stupefaction took possession of her again, and continued all those long miles till we reached Vottingham.

Mrs Stewart had settled we were not to take the train at Harefield, as usual, but at Vottingham. She had done so, I was certain, because she feared villagers and friends, perhaps even Mary and the Rector, might assemble at the nearer station and bid Aunt Jane a last good-bye. Now as the admirable Catherine could not possibly foretell what kind of despair her dear Mrs Sherbrook would be in, I think she dreaded some awkward scene calculated to make a noise—a noise which might perhaps re-echo in the county.

When we arrived at Vottingham, and the carriage stopped, Aunt Jane shrunk instinctively from Catherine Stewart, and wanted to take my arm. The weakness in her leg made it impossible for her to walk alone ; but the determined Catherine pushed me aside roughly enough, and peremptorily ordered my aunt to lean upon her. Aunt Jane obeyed.

Sir John Moultrie and one or two other acquaintances happened to be standing on the station platform. Aunt Jane knew Sir John, and held out her hand to him, yet when he spoke to her she could not answer him. The admirable Catherine answered for her, and with much visible feeling. But Mrs Stewart did not let emotion quite overpower her ; she bestirred herself, and became so thoughtful for Aunt Jane's comfort ! so good-natured in the sight of those observing county people ! Altogether, Mrs Stewart was enabled, I daresay she thought providentially enabled, to cover herself with glory at the Vottingham station. She got a carriage for us all to ourselves, and I actually saw her give the guard a two-shilling-piece to prevent his admitting any one else. She must have been terribly afraid we might travel up to town with Sir John Moultrie, or she would never have given the guard two shillings !

In the twinkling of an eye, the best of women transformed the carriage she had secured for us into a first-class widow's compartment. She pulled down all the blinds, and quickly buried Aunt Jane where no one could see her.

As I alone saw the final separation behind those closed curtains, I alone knew that Aunt Jane parted from her devoted friend without even saying good-bye to her. The last farewell was not omitted in anger, but in forgetfulness. The clever Catherine was careful not to rouse my aunt from lethargy by any word of hers.

Who could ever have foretold Aunt Jane and Mrs Stewart would have parted in silence, without one single word? Yet how often in life is the real fact thus curiously the contrary of what beforehand would seem the certain and inevitable.

Mrs Stewart and I also parted in silence. Aunt Jane did not appear to realise where she was, or that the train was starting till it had actually started. The feverish anxiety to know where she was going returned with the motion of the train, but did not last very long: her excitement died from the weariness of trying to understand what her mind could not grasp. So, little by little, she again fell into the apathy of unreasoning weakness.

As I gazed at my poor aunt with an awestricken, pitying heart, during that, to me, never-ending journey, I came to think that perhaps this stroke of paralysis was a great mercy,—a mercy sent her to dull the pain of parting from her home by the God whom Aunt Jane had truly, if queerly, served in happier days.

In our youth, at the age when we believe in the happiness of life, we look forward to the enfeebling illnesses of old age, especially to paralysis, with a mixture of horror and upbraiding rebellion against God's providence. Yet often, often, thought I, the unreasoning weakness must prove a friend sent by a merciful God. I could now understand how a clouded memory might even be the aged's best earthly friend. A sad friend, it is true; yet suited to a sad season, when other friends are dead or changed to us, and clear remembrance is but a sorrow.

CHAPTER XLI.

Aunt Jane had not been many days in Montagu Square before she recovered a certain sort of memory, a recollection not overmuch muddled for her, of poor dear Sophia, of poor dear Sophia's habit of never taking anybody's advice, of Sophy's very faulty education. In short, a remembrance of old times generally was brought back to her by the sight of the familiar rooms, by the associations of the house, where she had not been “for . . . for . . . for how many years, Sophy?” I had to repeat the exact number to her twenty times a-day. Numbers and the clear sense of time could find no abiding-place in

her poor brain. Old times seemed to have come near to her, while nearer years and months, and the weeks which touched the very day whose minutes she was living, were hazy distances.

Those last hours at Sherbrook Hall were a dream ; a dream, too, which soon went the misty way of dreams, and was forgotten. A childish terror of the attorney Boggle, and an undefined dread of Mrs Stewart, alone stood out from the bewilderment of that nightmare ; and yet at times Aunt Jane would wonder where "Catherine" was, and why she did not come and see her. "Catherine is not really angry with me, Sophy, because you see she gave me the silver teapot which I use every day, and used even that morning when you said I was tired and made me stay in bed for breakfast, so I do wonder why Catherine does not come to see me, and, Sophy, I wonder where Catherine is ?"

I would tell her Mrs Stewart had gone to Malta to see her son, who was dying—who, indeed, was all but dead. Aunt Jane would then remember Gordon-Sherbrook's lungs, and would wonder if Catherine arrived in time to see the poor young man still alive, and she would hope Catherine did, and greatly fear she did not. To which, having a very strong conviction on the subject, I invariably answered, "Mrs Stewart has arrived in time, Aunt Jane. I am sure she has ! She would take very good care not to arrive too late. Mrs Stewart would certainly arrive in time, in plenty of time, to make Gordon-Sherbrook's will."

"Sophy, you always say that, you know you do, and I cannot make out what you mean."

My poor aunt would look so painfully puzzled, that I would instantly change the conversation ; yet if she returned to the former question, I could not refrain from giving the same answer. "Mrs Stewart will certainly arrive in time to make Gordon-Sherbrook's will." Once when I had said this, Aunt Jane cried out, "Will ? will ? Sophy, was not there a mistake in somebody's will ? Sophy, Sophy, tell me ! I can't remember !" I parried the question as best I could, and soothed my aunt's suddenly awakened excitement by leading her quickly to a new idea : the fresh one swept the last away. There was no resisting grip as yet within her mind to grasp a thought and keep it. Only for the teapot with the bear's-head spout, she never would have asked so often about Mrs Stewart, but the sight of that teapot always brought back "Catherine" to her memory.

Had she seen Mr Boggle again, I think it likely she would have remembered about her husband's will,—that is, indeed, if

the terror of their last interview at Sherbrook Hall had not stifled former associations ; for it is just possible the attorney's presence, by reviving the dead memory of those last hours spent in her old home, might recall nothing but that one agitation ; and if that one, therefore none other. Aunt Jane's mind could now hold but one idea at a time. If excited, she became the prey, not of many fears and worries, but of one. One convulsing, irritating trouble would absorb her to itself. It would take possession of her like a tyrant who allows no power to reign beside his own.

The doctor I had privately consulted about my aunt told me to amuse her, and on no account to let her get excited. He said excitement might produce another attack, and be very dangerous. If she were kept quiet, he had a good opinion of her case, and he said she would almost recover the use of her leg. He told me an attack like hers was the commonest effect of a shock upon elderly people ; so common, indeed, did he seem to consider it, that I don't think he took much interest in the case. I was to send for him instantly if she got another stroke. Nothing ever gave me so great an idea of the misery a doctor in large practice in London must see, as the quite-natural, altogether-to-be-expected way, this man took my aunt's sad state.

I could not grow accustomed to poor Aunt Jane's senile weakness, though I lived with her day by day and all day long. The fallen jaw, the shifting and no longer infallible upper lip, the trembling head, the still shaking hand, pained me like a new pain each day. And it was well her look thus affected me. It kept pity, ay, and love, alive in the heart, which only for the sight of her would have been worried to death, because the stronger Aunt Jane became in health the more irritable did she grow in temper. Poor thing ! returning memory only made her grieve the more after her old home, her old habits, Snipkins and the servants " who knew her ways," Robert and the horses. She regretted all she had lost. At times her spirits were woefully depressed, and she would seem to feel degraded by the loss of fortune, house, and servants.

I hired a house for her two doors from my own in Montagu Square, but she would take no interest in it. She was even rather huffy about it, and said she did not like it as well as mine, and seemed to think I wanted to get rid of her, and kept on repeating irritably that there surely was no hurry for David's return. I was becoming rather frightened to see my aunt preferred living with me to living in a house of her own. She

liked to have me always with her, and liked me to keep on dropping little remarks to her all day long, and half the night, so as to enable her to talk incessantly herself, for she could no longer turn on her own axis unless you set her going every now and then.

I had hoped the furnishing of the new house would amuse her. She was so difficult to amuse! But she did not care for new furniture now. She longed too intensely after the old Sherbrook chairs, and "the round table, Sophy, which always was in the middle of the drawing-room; and, Sophy, you will never find another table like that one, because it had only one straight leg and a round thing at the bottom, with casters underneath; and all the other tables I have ever seen have three sort of claws, and no round thing at the bottom. No, Sophy! no! I can't go and see the table you speak of, for I am sure it has claws; besides, I should catch my death of cold in that shop. I know I should, because I always get my feet wet everywhere except just on the pavement round this square, for the pavement is very dry in this square, though I must say it is drier in front of this house than in front of the one you have taken for me; so I like this house the best, because I think the soil is much drier, and there is a very great difference in soils; and poor dear Snipkins"—(by some unaccountable process, Snipkins had gradually become a *poor dear!*)—"and poor dear Snipkins," continued my aunt, "who was always so attentive to me, and had her Bible at her finger-ends, and knew all my little ways, and never gave me my cuffs before my collar. Poor dear Snipkins! and I wonder where she is, Sophy? And I wonder if she has gone to Malta with Catherine . . ." My aunt sighed and shed a tear. "I . . . wonder . . . what was I saying, Sophy? What was I saying?"

"You were saying, Aunt Jane, that Snipkins thought some soils were drier than others;" and I added cheerfully, "This is a very dry soil, Aunt Jane,—very! The whole square is remarkably dry; every bit of it is dry; and when Snipkins used to come to London long ago, she was always perfectly well here, but then, Aunt Jane, remember she went out walking every day. So come out, Aunt Jane; it is not raining, and it is exactly a quarter to twelve by that clock."

But Aunt Jane would not take her morning walk. She would now frequently refuse to leave her chair, saying that if she did go out she had nowhere in particular to go; that a widow like her could not pay visits; that Madame Julie Browne had made all her dresses, and that London was such a very big place that,

except for the difference of soil, there was no reason why you should walk in one part of it more than in another.

When she would not go out, I was at my wits' end to amuse her. She felt too much injured at having neither back nor front avenue to let herself be amused. She was tearful, huffy, and infinitely depressed. At such times she sighed, but rarely spoke; or if she did speak, it would be merely to remark that when she went out at Sherbrook Hall she always knew exactly how far she had walked, and never walked more one day than another without knowing it.

At last an idea struck me! I invented a back and a front avenue for Aunt Jane on the pavement round Montagu Square. I persuaded her to walk on the west side in the morning, and on the east in the afternoon, and never by any chance to do the contrary, as the sun always set in the west and never set in the east; and therefore, by setting behind the houses, the sun was sooner lost to the western than to the eastern side, and the west side was consequently the drier one in the morning, and the damper one in the afternoon. Aunt Jane had much difficulty in grasping these abstruse astronomical reasons; but from the moment she made them her own, her mind was at ease, and before luncheon she walked up and down on the west side, and after luncheon she walked up and down on the east side of Montagu Square. She leant upon my arm, and constantly remarked, "If you only count exactly how many turns we take to-day, Sophy, we can take just the same to-morrow, and then you see we can never walk more one day than another without knowing it."

So my aunt went out each day at a quarter to twelve. If by accident she happened to be dressed at half-past eleven, she waited fifteen minutes in the hall.

To please her, I observed all the old Sherbrook punctuality—the hours for breakfasting, lunching, and dining; and I even caused frightening-bells and warning-bells to be rung regularly. I really believe the accustomed sounds kept Aunt Jane alive by making her feel there was still a constant rush and hurry and a positive necessity for punctuality in this busy life of hers. Besides, the odd quarters of an hour and half-hours, and even hours, you can lose by systematically getting ready to be ready, do materially help to turn twelve hours into six.

From long habit I managed to bear the constant bell-ringing with equanimity, although I found the nuisance more trying in a small house than in a large one. It was not the bells, but Dr MacShaw, that most tried my patience. I had perceived, to my

horror, that with returning strength my aunt's mind hankered after the 'Commentary,' so I had dexterously mislaid the blessed work.

"Poor dear Edward!" wailed my aunt,—"poor dear Edward always wished me to read Dr MacShaw's exposition of the Holy Scriptures. Sophy, it was poor dear Edward, your poor dear uncle, who wished me to read it." Aunt Jane would then be affected to tears; and if I suggested any other less lengthy Commentary, I invariably found I was heartlessly arguing with "poor dear Edward"! At last my aunt became so nervously excited and irritated by the loss of her sound divine, that I had to find him again, and listen to him also.

Aunt Jane could not read aloud easily, as her utterance was thicker than it used to be, and still she would read Dr MacShaw herself. She would not let me read him to the servants, though I actually offered to do so. Poor Aunt Jane! it was painful to hear her, and yet it was a little touching too: the striving to be what you have been, the determination not to hear your own changed voice nor to perceive your failing faculties, is a tragic sort of play to see, and must ever move one!

Dr MacShaw raised my aunt's spirits. It was strange her orthodoxy should have survived all her shocks, and troubles, and bewilderment! for Aunt Jane still felt herself to be the most orthodox woman in Christendom, though she could not have given a reason for the feeling. In her muddle of mind, her orthodoxy was neither more nor less than an instinct. Indeed I rather think it was by the sound alone that she judged doctrine to be right or wrong. Texts had to be vaguely amplified with a great deal of the peculiar language, or she was sure to perceive the thin end of the wedge. I had much difficulty in discovering a clergyman whose preaching sounded safe to her ear. The fact is, the old peculiar language had wellnigh ceased to be heard in the West End of London. I found that here and there a new sort of peculiar language was being gabbled and mumbled, and partly intoned—a paternally authoritative language, all about saints'-days and the Church, especially about the Church.

Two distinct species of clergy speak the new tongue. The one is bearded and slightly irreverent in manner—very very *high* in the pulpit, and quite *low* out of it; clergymen much given to society, who seem all things to all men. The "great lengths they go," as the saying is, astonish intimate friends—for their extreme Ritualism, like their teeth, is hidden by their moustache.

The other sort of Ritualist is a very different kind of man. There was one of this second species officiating not far from Montagu Square. He spoke the new tongue. He generally spoke it shortly, and this was a great advantage; but he did not speak eloquently. He was a poor, lean, clean-shaven, ascetic, wooden priest, as deficient in mental as in bodily strength. He was sanctimonious, very sanctimonious in appearance. I really think he tried to ape the oddly contorted and party-coloured saints on the stained-glass windows of his church.

His forehead and his chin flew backwards from his open mouth, as if weakly astonished at the doctrine they heard preached; and I do not wonder!—for it certainly was rather surprising to hear such a pitifully weak, narrow-brained man laud a something which sounded very much like his own infallibility sanctified and turned into a dogma of faith. The humble unquestioning obedience he claimed for the Church in theory he explained, in his own peculiar language, to mean in practice the unreasoning acceptance of his own priestly interfering, minutely interfering despotism. I perceived that nothing which was not infinitely minute pleased his mind. He liked the infinitely minute in matters of clothing and ritual. His cassock, his alb, his cope, the exact position of himself, his hands, and even of his eyes when he prayed, were, I verily believe, three parts of his religion. When he walked about the streets, the cut of his coat and the shape of his becoming low-crowned hat were most remarkable. I think he liked wearing becoming clothes, because the weaker man, like the weaker woman, has a failing for millinery.

I used to be quite glad when Aunt Jane caught sight of the peculiar hat and the long-flapped coat flitting through Montagu Square. I was glad because she was immensely shocked at thus beholding the too visible mark of the Beast! and it is very good for old ladies like my aunt to be occasionally shocked—it gives them something to say, and raises their circulation. One sight of the Reverend Mr Smith enabled Aunt Jane to talk almost without help for the rest of the day.

The name of the medieval priest was merely Smith—not even de Snythe. This always seemed odd to me, as he looked to date from the earliest ages! In reality, he was a man of no family whatever—quite the contrary! The only profession in England which now gives immediate social position to a young man with no connections, is that of the ritualistic priesthood. Therefore ritualism, with its other temptations, offers this great social one to weak men like Mr Smith.

The Reverend Mr Smith did not stay long in our neighbourhood. He was soon removed to a church not two hundred yards from Belgrave Square. The last time I heard of him, he was said to be engaged to a lady of rank, rather older than himself. I cannot say whether this report be true or not; but I do know as a fact that he is a great favourite with the ladies. He encourages confession; and this they all like, especially the more worldly dashing ones. His "early celebrations," matins, nones, complins, and numerous saints'-day services, are overcrowded by ladies of fashion. The higher their heels and the tighter their forty-guinea skirts, the more certainly do they become members of Saint-Electra-the-Blessed's congregation. There would seem to be a natural tendency towards ritualism amongst the fast and ultra-fashionable; and as to yellow hair and reddened lips and blackened eyebrows, why I have heard it said that if only young enough, they are invariably High Church. False fronts and the more elderly types of female disfigurement are still, like Lady Arabella, not unfrequently *low*, —for Low Church was the fashion in Lady Arabella's youth.

Fashion does more for religion nowadays than martyrdom in the days of old; and to my mind it is sad—it is horrible this should be so.

While I was searching for a clergyman whom Aunt Jane could "sit under" and feel safe, I took her to Mr Smith's church. The shock she there received quite galvanised her paralysis, and was of more use to her than the doctor's tonic prescription; but it had one very awkward result for me. Aunt Jane got an attack of ritualistic-popery on the brain. She saw the popish plot everywhere—even in the services of clergymen who held most moderate views. My aunt became *lower* than she had ever been before. I saw that in her present state no one but a regular old-fashioned Thunderbore would sound safe to her ear.

At last, to my great relief, I discovered a divine whose "views" I thought would suit hers. I took her to the proprietary chapel where he preached, and I rejoice to say my aunt was delighted with Dr Flanagan, and "sat under" him with a feeling of perfect safety, because for two successive Sundays he preached on the types and antetypes of Solomon's Temple. He divided each sermon into four heads, not counting the final "and now to conclude," which was a lengthy discourse in itself.

The four heads of the first sermon were, to use Dr Flanagan's own words—1, dimensions; 2, the platform raised; 3, stones fitted and polished; 4, overlaid with silver.

And the four heads of the second—1, covered with cedar ; 2, carved ; 3, enshrined in gold ; 4, adorned with precious stones.

Under each of these heads were classed the types and antetypes of every faith, heresy, virtue, backsliding, and theological and historical event I had almost ever heard of.

My aunt felt spiritually refreshed by the types and antetypes of Solomon's Temple. The doctrine sounded so perfectly orthodox to her ear, because she had heard much the same sort of thing before : if new, it would not have sounded safe.

Aunt Jane said Dr Flanagan's preaching reminded her of dear Mr Thunderbore's favourite sermon on the golden vessels of the tabernacle ; and so it did me ! for I had not forgotten, and never shall forget, the exhaustive and exhausting discourse preached by the Vicar of Klipton upon the text, "The tongs thereof and the snuff dishes thereof shall be of pure gold."

Highly as Aunt Jane rated the Reverend Dr Flanagan's doctrine in the pulpit, still more highly did she rate his soundness and his learning when she came to read and to digest the books he had published specially for members of his own congregation. There was one small work of Biblical research which became a great favourite with Aunt Jane. I copy word for word some of the important and interesting facts it contained :—

The middle chapter and the least in the Bible is Psalm cxvii.

The middle verse is the 8th verse of Psalm cxviii.

The middle time is 2 Chronicles, chapter iv., 16th verse.

The word AND occurs in the Old Testament 35,543 times.

The word AND occurs in the New Testament 10,684 times.

There are 66 books in the Holy Bible, 1189 chapters, 31,173 verses, 773,602 words, 3,566,480 letters.

The middle book of the Old Testament is Proverbs. The middle chapter is Job xxix. The middle verse is in 2 Chronicles, chapter xx., *between* the 17th and 18th verses.

The least verse is 1 Chronicles, chapter i., 1st verse.

The 21st verse of the 7th chapter of Ezra has all the letters of the alphabet.

The middle book of the New Testament is Thessalonians ii.

The middle chapter is *between* Romans xiii. and xiv.

The middle verse is Acts xvii., 17th verse.

The least verse is John xi., 35th verse.

Amongst all this erudite information, the one piece of profound research which most impressed Aunt Jane's imagination was—the word AND occurs in the Old Testament 35,543 times ; the word AND occurs in the New Testament 10,684 times.

My aunt herself tried to count the *ands* in the Old Testament, and I declare I thought she would send me clean out of my senses ; for every two minutes she would ask, " Sophy, Sophy, did I last say 152, or 153, or 154 ?—for now I almost think I really said 151."

" I am sure I don't know, Aunt Jane ! "

" You never do know anything, Sophy !—you never know anything ! So I think it is very lucky I put a pencil-mark at the hundredth *and*, for now at least I can always go back to that one."

As she never rightly counted to a thousand, the long patience (which is genius) of the divine who could count 35,543 *ands* in the Old Testament and 10,684 in the New, overpowered her with admiring veneration.

" Poor dear Edward ! " she would exclaim ; " poor dear Edward ! How diligently he would have studied Dr Flanagan's interesting little work ! Poor dear Edward ! I wish he could have read it before he died, Sophy. Poor dear Edward ! —and I do wonder, Sophy, if Catherine has ever read it ? And I really do not think she has ; and I must say I do think she really would appreciate it, for Catherine is not like you, Sophy ! because she always did enjoy everything that was improving—and indeed Catherine never read any but good books, Sophy, never ! And I do wonder now if Catherine would like me to send her a copy of Dr Flanagan's valuable work ; because, perhaps, Sophy, poor Gordon-Sherbrook might like Catherine to read it out to him ; for, as he is not dead, I think he may be getting better."

Aunt Jane's fear of Mrs Stewart was gradually creating the desire to propitiate her—fear, especially undefined fear, so often produces this tendency in weak characters.

I should have had great trouble in preventing Aunt Jane from sending Dr Flanagan out to Malta, and from thus entangling herself in a correspondence with Catherine Stewart, had we not just then received the news of Gordon-Sherbrook's death. It was David wrote it to me, and he had heard it in Scotland from some of the numerous Stewart connection.

" At last, Sophy," wrote he, " that unhappy man has been tatted to death. I need hardly say your admirable Catherine did arrive in time to make his will. Her brother-in-law—Stewart of Starvey—tells me she is left Sherbrook Hall and everything by a will signed just two days before the poor young fellow's death. Stewart knows his sister-in-law so well, that he did not seem a bit surprised."

Can it be believed ? Aunt Jane's mind was in such a strange maze that she said to me, "I daresay, Sophy, that Catherine will not care to live at Sherbrook Hall, so I should not be surprised if she asked me to go and live there, and gave the house and place back to me again,—for it was Gordon-Sherbrook who was so very particular about everything." Unless I had heard my aunt say these words with her own lips, no power on earth could have made me believe she would have said them. It was an incomprehensible miracle that memory should return and yet be wholly a wrong impression. Catherine's hard, self-seeking covetousness was the one idea you would expect Aunt Jane's memory to bring back to her if it returned at all.

Although I contradicted Aunt Jane's new notion till I feared seriously to excite her and make her ill, I could not root out the new impression I saw growing upon her, that she would soon return to Sherbrook, and live there, perhaps even with Catherine, again—"for Catherine is not really angry with me, Sophy."

There is a certain sort of hazily forgetting, and therefore forgiving charity, believing no ill of any person who has once seized a real, firm, tyrannical grip of your mind, which is very puzzling to consider thoughtfully, for it is not the real Christian charity at all.

By aid of the new impression, Mrs Stewart regained her former hold upon my aunt's mind and affections: so much so, that another letter I received from David sent Aunt Jane into hysterics and loud despair. David wrote to me saying: "The admirable Catherine having at last grasped all your uncle's fortune and estate, has been seized with a dangerous attack of typhoid fever. The fever has caught her in the midst of her successful plots and plans just as she was leaving Malta, and I declare, Sophy, it looks uncommonly as if she had been struck down by the very Providence whose name she so blasphemously takes in vain. I expect she is really going to die."

To this I instantly replied: "My dearest David,—You are mistaken ! Disagreeable people have remarkably good constitutions ! A fever that would kill you won't kill Mrs Stewart. All cats have nine lives, and the hungry ones have ten ! Come, David, I will lay you a wager, a £5-note, that the admirable tatter will live, and for many a long year will cheerfully rejoice over her poor son's 'happy release.' Believe me, the woman is too disagreeable to die !"

David took the bet, and I gained it; but David did not pay it, because he wanted money at the time.

Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart made a rapid recovery. I was informed that she astonished the worthy naval surgeon, who attended her for nothing.

Aunt Jane rejoiced every hour in the day over poor dear Catherine's blessed deliverance from a fearful malady. The typhoid attack had turned Catherine into a "poor dear"!

Poor dear Catherine's illness kept Aunt Jane in an everlasting round of wonder. "Sophy, now that poor dear Catherine is getting better, I wonder if she takes beef-tea? I wonder if she is very pale? She always was rather pinched and yellow! I wonder what she looks like, Sophy?"

"She looks, Aunt Jane, like a sick rook in a graveyard, pecking at her son's will as if it were a horrid worm."

"What do you mean? What do you mean, Sophy?" gasped my aunt.

"I mean, Aunt Jane, that the first thought Catherine Stewart will bring back with her from death and from the grave will be that will. She will grasp it in her yellow claws, and gloat over it with craving hunger."

But Aunt Jane could not see this picture of the greedy Catherine. She could not follow my eyes and see what I saw. She only added to eternal wonderings about poor dear Catherine, endless wonderings as to what Sophy meant, and as to why Sophy never would speak exactly like other people, but always said queer things.

Mrs Sherbrook Stewart's perfect restoration to bodily and mental health was announced to us in rather a peculiar way. She sent Aunt Jane an attorney's letter, requesting the immediate payment of an enclosed account. This was a bill for £180. The items were servants' wages and other expenses of housekeeping incurred during the month my aunt had remained at Sherbrook Hall after my uncle's death.

I instantly paid the £180. My pride revolted from the idea of Aunt Jane's being forced to haggle about housekeeping expenses with a woman like Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart.

From the day Aunt Jane received Mrs Stewart's bill, I noticed with pleasure that she ceased to call the best of women "poor dear Catherine." Had I only had a little more money to spare, I should have thought the £180 well spent; for I saw Aunt Jane could understand the meanness of the housekeeper's bill. I saw it almost opened her eyes to one side of Mrs Stewart's character. Little unladylike housekeeping meannesses made Aunt Jane very indignant, and were perfectly within the grasp

of her comprehension. Intrigues about wills, deeply undermining and lasting many years, were beyond her power of imagination.

CHAPTER XLII.

As I could not go to David yet, I found that by thinking of him always, I brought him to me, and I again fell into my old habit of walking with my imagination beside me. I thus not unfrequently had almost an agreeable walk on the pavement round Montagu Square, because my thoughts were not there at all. If poor Aunt Jane were particularly irritable, and the weather a depressing smoky fog, they wandered in spring-time by the path over the hill at Sherbrook Hall, and there David and I would meet as we first met on that day which seemed to me like yesterday. If I live to be an old woman, that day will still be yesterday; and when I am deaf, I still shall hear its pleasant warbling sounds; and when my eyes are growing dim, I know that even then I shall see David coming up to meet me from the valley like the spirit of one of those far-off voices my ear remembers still.

As of old, I loved most to dwell upon the memory of that day. Hours of unconscious, unawakened happiness, like pleasant dreams, or like the joys of childhood, leave an impression of quiet rapture on the mind which the remembrance of impassioned, throbbing, conscious joy, or of sorrow thrilled suddenly into delirious delight, can never leave. The agitation of intense excitement is painful, and there is a joy, the pang of which can almost kill. It is no pleasure to think upon it and feel its pain again.

That my imagination should have preferred the old familiar scene to the new ones it could so easily have painted before my eyes, will doubtless seem odd; but the truth is, I did not care to be always seeing David, as he now was, in Louisa Clarke's presence. I naturally liked better to see him in my own.

Those Clarkees had got hold of David. They had taken a place in Scotland, and eight of David's last letters had been written from their house. The moment Mrs Stewart got better, he could write about nothing but the private theatricals he and the Clarke girls and Mrs Clownton were rehearsing, apparently morning, noon, and night.

I had often heard of this Mrs Clownton before from Lady Arabella. Her father's mother was a near relation of Lady Arabella's stepmother's first husband. Indeed, every one has heard of the Honble. Mrs Augustus Clownton, so I need not say much about her. If she goes to stay in a country house for a week, she gets up private theatricals, and stays three, perhaps six weeks. She is quite mad about acting, and has made it her regular profession in society. She gives up her life to this mania. It is generally believed that she went on the stage to perfect her elocution, and appeared publicly in the provinces. She is considered decidedly fast, but Lady Arabella had told me fashionable mothers do not object to her, because she has the reputation of giving the right parts to the right people, and of making up desirable matches by a judicious system of rehearsal. As a rule, she is perfectly successful in her little arrangements, though I do remember Lady Arabella telling me she had once signally failed. On that occasion the right people had rehearsed together, and the wrong people had run away. However, it seems nobody then blamed Mrs Clownton. It was acknowledged she had done what she could, and could not do more. Women of the world did not drop her. "She goes everywhere!" Lady Arabella had said; "my dear Sophy, she goes everywhere!" Mrs Clownton is full of tact and cleverness, and does not make up matches on the stage, but off it. She is strictly proper, too, and invariably gives the lover's part to a married man. Mrs Clownton could never be guilty of making a good *parti* propose in the glare of the footlights, so the young men are not afraid of her. All her combinations are behind the scenes."

I remembered these words the more distinctly, because Lady Arabella had hallowed them at the time by the sanctifying whisper of scandal. Not having in the least forgotten them, I was glad, when David first mentioned this Mrs Augustus Clownton, to think he himself was married, and Louisa Clarke engaged to Mr Fred Tankney. And then I could not understand why I should be glad. David had long ceased to like Louisa before he had proposed to me. I knew he had, so I was not at all jealous of her. No; I knew I was not. Of this I felt perfectly certain. Though, on second thoughts, I did perhaps think I might have felt a very little bit jealous of her . . . well, that is a strong term . . . a little bit uncomfortable about her, if the Louisa of nowadays had been the soft, melting Louisa I had known in my girlhood. But I quickly conjured up before my eyes the slangy fast young lady just fresh from

Manyfields, whom I had met at Mineham. And now my imagination could see her acting as the heroine of a piece called "Our Young Swells." I laughed aloud at the sight, and startled Aunt Jane, who thought "Sophy" queerer than ever.

Apropos of these "Young Swells," David had written to me: "As I am the only married man here under fourteen stone odd, Mrs Clownton will insist upon my acting lover to Miss Louisa." So I wrote back and asked him if acting lover to Louisa meant lighting her cigar? Whereupon David and I exchanged a good deal of lively jesting upon this and all other subjects. David was a very lively and agreeable letter-writer, and did not write, like most Englishmen, circumspectly for judge and jury. His letters to me and mine to him were now the one pleasure of my life. David is the only person I know to whom I care to write, because when I write to him I can be as imprudent as I like, and say exactly what comes into my head. A perfectly natural letter shocks most people, and it is this which makes ordinary letter-writing the hateful burden it is.

David's lively descriptions of the amateur actors staying in the Clarkes' house, and of their sayings and doings, and huffs, and rehearsal flirtations, greatly amused me. David dashed off these portraits in the highest spirits and most natural language. The only part of his agreeable letters I did not altogether enjoy was the constantly recurring postscript: "I am fearfully hard up, Sophy. Send me another £10-note." I began to realise that David was a man who always spent a great deal more money than he expected. If he thought a certain sum would last a fortnight, it lasted exactly one week.

During our honeymoon I had perceived he was a very generous creature, without the slightest capacity for arithmetic. When Uncle Sherbrook died, he had told me to take a house and furnish it for Aunt Jane, and to give my aunt any allowance I liked—£200, £300, £400, £500, even £600 a-year!—it was all the same to him! What could be kinder in its way than this? David literally fulfilled the Gospel precept, and his right hand never knew what his left hand gave; so what he gave with his left hand he expected to find in his right. I was beginning to fear he forgot his own charities, for he seemed to think he had my £2000 a-year, as well as his own little allowance from Lady Arabella, in hand and to spend.

When I sent him clear calculations to prove the contrary, I only discovered he heartily detested arithmetic. He told me so in the most natural style imaginable, and was quite witty on the subject. I did not know how to scold him.

Once only did I find fault with David, and reproach him a little for what he had written. It was when he wrote: "I am delighted, my dear Sophy, you are not here. You would be dreadfully in the way, for Mrs Clownton is determined to make every person who does not act feel *de trop* in this house. As your uncle is not dead six months, it would be impossible, they all tell me, for you to take part in private theatricals. You ladies cannot throw off your mourning and put it on again like us men. No one seems a bit scandalised at my acting; indeed Mrs Clownton and Miss Louisa declare they could not get on without me. They both say, if you came here hung all over with black crape, you might prevent me from dashing about as one of *our young swells*, in a sky-blue satin dressing-gown, so Louisa Clarke repeats fifty times a-day it is the luckiest thing possible you did not come north with me, and I begin to think that, under the circumstances, perhaps it is. Not, my dear Sophy, that I could think so under any other."

This last sentence pleased me, yet could not take away the effect of the one before it. The tone of the whole letter hurt me. I told David so. Whereupon he wrote to me in such a repentant, affectionate manner, that I forgave him, and even felt ashamed at having chided him.

I looked forward with great joy to our near meeting, for at last I thought I could name the very day when David would come home to me. Aunt Jane's house was to be ready for her in a fortnight's time.

I did not at all like telling her so! For many days I put off until the morrow the disagreeable task of telling Aunt Jane about her house, and hinting to her about moving into it. When at last I managed to gather courage and broach the delicate subject, the result was very unsatisfactory.

"Aunt Jane," I said, nervously, "it is fortunate your house is just ready, or when David comes home I should not know where to put him."

"As David is well amused, he had much better stay where he is," replied my aunt with surprising point and energy. "David will be very much bored if he comes here and has to lead the quiet sort of life we lead, because he is not like poor dear Edward! Poor, poor dear Edward! David is not a bit like him! not a bit, Sophy!"

Aunt Jane took no pains to conceal that, in her opinion, David was anything but an improving companion for me; so not being an improving husband, like poor dear Edward, she never seemed to think he was my husband at all. She appeared

incapable of grasping the fact that I was as much married to David as she had been to Uncle Sherbrook.

I stole round again to the matter I had most at heart. "Aunt Jane," I said, "when you are once settled in your new house, it is so near this one, that you will feel exactly as if you were living under the same roof with me."

"No, Sophy!" she exclaimed,—"no; I shall not feel as if I were doing anything of the sort! because, instead of telling you several times during the morning to put on your things before twelve o'clock, I shall have to send some one in from my house to remind you to get ready. I know I shall! and I know you will be talking to David, or else he will be talking to you, for Catherine used to say he was always talking, and always talking about himself; and I am sure he is not at all what I call a sensible man, Sophy, and he has no idea of method or punctuality, and I know you have very little either."

I turned a patient ear to these and to other little irrelevant extras, and, in spite of every discouragement, I brought my aunt back to the point. I well knew what my own point was. I said quietly: "Yes, Aunt Jane, David is very unpunctual and very provoking, so I am sure you would not like to live with him. I think, my dear, you will be glad to find yourself once more in a house of your own."

To this my aunt only replied: "I don't like a damp house, and I never will like a damp house, Sophy!"

I suggested that a house never could be really dry unless there was some one living in it.

"I shall not argue, Sophy," said my aunt huffily,—"I shall not argue any more."

I ransacked my brain, and still persevered, but nothing I could say seemed to throw a glamour over the incurably damp soil of a house not five yards from the dry ground beneath our own feet.

It was then I found I had made a foolish mistake. I saw I should have removed my aunt straight from Sherbrook Hall into a house of her own, for now that I had let her have her punctual bells tinkling every hour, and the Commentary besides, she had taken root in mine. My house had become a habit to her, and all the more easily, because she had been accustomed to stay there of old. A fresh house, where she had never been before, would be a new habit to her, and therefore a disturbing, hateful distraction of mind.

I was in despair!

To make matters worse, David kept writing to me: "Sophy,

I will not settle a day for my return, until I hear your aunt is actually living in her own house."

It was under these apparently hopeless circumstances that an invitation came from Lady Arabella to Aunt Jane, pressing my aunt to pay her a nice long visit at Mineham, and saying Lady Arabella had some very interesting little bits of news to her. It was a really kind letter. The invitation enchanted me! I fervently hoped Aunt Jane would accept it, especially as by the very same post I got a hasty line from David, written as if he knew beforehand of Lady Arabella's intended invitation. It was a hurried scrawl put in an envelope, with the stamp upside down. "Expect me next Saturday," he wrote; "we are to have a dress rehearsal on Thursday, and our final grand display on Friday. That Mrs Clownton is a hateful woman! If you do not make your Aunt Jane accept Aunt Arabella's invitation, I shall never forgive you."

I was nervously afraid Aunt Jane would refuse to go, so I was agreeably surprised to hear her wonder what news dear Lady Arabella could have to tell her! and then remark that really Mineham was a very dry house, very! nearly as dry as Sherbrook Hall; "but . . . but . . . but you know, Sophy, I am in too deep mourning to go anywhere, and Lady Arabella is not a relation."

I pointed out that Lady Arabella was now a very near connection, being my aunt by marriage. This was a powerful argument in favour of Mineham, for Aunt Jane held the strongest family clique views on the subject of mourning. Aunt Jane seemed pleased to think that Lady Arabella, being my aunt by marriage, might certainly be considered a connection of her own.

So Aunt Jane said she would go to Mineham. Then she said she would not go. She changed her mind several times, and kept me in a nervous fever. She prayed over the invitation. Finally she declared poor dear Edward would have liked her to accept it: "Yes, Sophy, I know poor dear Edward would! I know he would! And I wonder, Sophy, what sort of news it is Lady Arabella is going to tell me."

At the last moment, I thought Aunt Jane would never start. I was to take her down to Mineham, and settle her there. Having for many years been accustomed, when travelling, to the protection of poor dear Edward, my aunt seemed to expect every sort of dreadful accident would happen to her, "now that I have only you, Sophy." I think she was much surprised when at length she arrived at Mineham perfectly uninjured.

Lady Arabella dared not rush out in the cold to meet us on the doorstep, for fear of inflaming her delicate throat, but she waved a welcome to us through the hall window instead, and looked quite rapturously delighted to see us, and appeared to be talking volubly at the other side of the glass. She was talking as we entered the door, and literally overflowed upon us in the hall. Before we could reach the drawing-room, I knew that Lord Studhorsey was at last engaged to Miss Elmer-Elmer, that Denis spent half his time at Manyfields, that Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was dying of jealousy, that Lady Offaway's conduct was shocking in the extreme, that young Mr Tankney was behaving scandalously, and that Lady Arabella had not had a soul to talk to for a century. Lady Arabella never considered Mrs Thunderbore anybody. Lady Arabella having first said "a century," corrected herself, and said it was exactly a fortnight since Catherine Sherbrook-Stewart had spent two days with her. "David heard Catherine was here, from the Clarkes, who heard it from Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, who, by the by, Sophy, won't speak to Catherine now! and David wrote me the most severe scolding I ever got in my life. He said, if I could not live alone, I might very well ask your Aunt Jane to come and stay with me, but that he would never speak to me again if I had Catherine any more." Lady Arabella lowered her voice, and half closing the door, kept me standing outside it.

Aunt Jane had already entered the room wondering aloud, wondering hopelessly. Her mind could not grasp such rapid novelty,—it could not rush from one fresh bit of news to another,—so she was still wondering about Lord Studhorsey and Miss Elmer-Elmer, and she wondered what duet it was she had heard Lord Studhorsey sing with Ermyntrude Elmer-Elmer.

We could hear Aunt Jane wondering on in this style, all by herself, in the drawing-room. Lady Arabella spoke in a whisper. "David has told me a great many facts about Catherine, Sophy," said she, "which I did not know before, and I never was more surprised, never! for, Sophy, you cannot imagine how nicely Catherine spoke about the inscrutable ways of Providence, and the miraculous manner in which she herself had been endowed with a wholly unexpected fortune."

"I can imagine it, Aunt Arabella," I replied.

Lady Arabella again lowered her voice, as in speaking it had risen above the depths of perfect mystery. "Catherine is a most extraordinary person—most extraordinary!" she whis-

pered ; "I could hardly believe David at first when he wrote and told me how Catherine has behaved about your uncle's will, and how she has managed to cut that poor James Sherbrook and his nine children out of the property. But what is that, Sophy," and Lady Arabella forgot to whisper,—"what is that to the enormity of persuading your uncle to change the will, in which you were left £30,000 at your aunt's death ? I might have forgiven Catherine," she naively confessed, "for ruining James Sherbrook, but I never will forgive her for having cut David out of his just expectations. It is a great disappointment to me, Sophy, and a terrible one to David ! terrible ! He was quite sure of the £30,000, for your uncle told him you would have it when he proposed for you, and I had heard it from Catherine herself months before. I now see Catherine has cheated us all ! Poor David !"

A sudden fear seized me. "David is not disappointed !" I exclaimed indignantly ; "David did not marry me for money !"

My voice re-echoed in the empty hall, and came back to me, to surprise me with my own anger. I had startled Lady Arabella. She stared at me through her glasses, and flinging open the door, she trotted into the drawing-room to Aunt Jane, who was still wondering over the Elmer-Elmer and Studhorsey match. Matrimonial engagements always interest Aunt Jane, even when she does not know the people engaged : when she does know them, the interest is intense. Fortunately Lady Arabella had a great deal to say, and could not help saying it, about Lord Studhorsey's £20,000 a-year,—about the jealousy of sundry musical mothers, and the delight of that Mrs Elmer, who was reported to have said : "My dear Miss Horston, I felt all along I was perfectly right in not allowing Mr Reginald Meltem to sing *t'Amo* with my Ermyntrude." This Miss Horston is one of Lady Arabella's twenty-five constant correspondents, and the greatest gossip of them all. Except the annual concerts for the Blacks, and occasional bazaaring, and much talking, Lady Arabella's only real occupation in life lies in writing and receiving letters. By means of her correspondence, she is not unfrequently loaded with the gossip of sixteen country houses, besides all the ordinary small-talk and scandal of London. At such times she is a gun which must be fired off or burst.

The Elmer-Elmer and Studhorsey engagement continued until dinner-time. The subject was renewed at the dinner-table, and there became entangled in a bit of intermarriage connected with Lord Studhorsey's grandmother's sister's husband, who was Lady Arabella's grandfather's first cousin. So intricate was the com-

plication, that we hurried dinner, and rose before dessert, in order to hasten into the drawing-room and consult Debrett.

Much as I dislike the complications of intermarriage, I was glad to see my two aunts occupied with any one's marriage, save David's and mine. I nervously dreaded another hint of the idea which Lady Arabella had betrayed to me. I longed to forget it; or if I could not forget it, I wished to think of it alone, and disprove the cruel suspicion to myself, when no one should be there to guess my thoughts, or curiously to observe them redden in my face.

When at length the Studhorsey relationship was exhausted, I rejoiced to find the great Elmer-Elmer "catch" led, by the natural transitions of musical jealousy, straight to Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, and nowhere near David. Lady Arabella said Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was infinitely disgusted that "a mere singer of solfeggi"—for that is what she always will call Miss Ermyntrude—"should have caught" a rich peer. From Jumping Georgy, Lady Arabella passed to Rigardy-Wrenstone, and on mentioning his name, fell instantly into the whisper of scandal. I overheard "constantly at Manyfields." A groan from Aunt Jane drowned the rest; then I heard, "Don't be alarmed, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, don't be alarmed! He merely goes there for the fashion of the thing! Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone has no real cause for jealousy. It is that son of Lord Tankney's . . ." Lady Arabella dropped her voice still lower, and Aunt Jane's groans increasing, I only heard such bits of sentences as "Lady Offaway . . . shocking in the extreme . . . Mr Tankney . . . perfectly scandalous . . . she wanted to take him to Scotland . . . Lord Offaway refused . . . Lady Offaway would not go without him . . . stayed at Manyfields . . . Mr Tankney rides over . . . meet every day . . . everybody knows it . . . Lady Offaway . . . quite spoilt the neighbourhood . . . appropriates all the young men . . . inexpressibly shocking . . . fine tenor voice . . . having been introduced by me into society, Mr Tankney might have gone anywhere." Under these circumstances, it was certainly deplorable he should go to Manyfields and never come to Mineham.

Amidst her own groans and moans over the wickedness of a world much changed since her youth, Aunt Jane managed to exclaim, "But, Lady Arabella, Mr Tankney is engaged, and he is engaged to that pretty girl Louisa Clarke, and she really is very pretty, and, poor girl, how very dreadful for her!"

"She deserves it! she deserves it, Mrs Sherbrook!" cried Lady Arabella, in loud indignation: "a lady who can jilt a

gentleman, no matter how desirable it may have been for him, thoroughly deserves to be jilted herself ! *Du reste*, my dear Mrs Sherbrook, that young lady is the most accomplished of flirts ! She is a very dangerous girl, and she will flirt with any one, for it is her nature to flirt ; she . . .” Lady Arabella paused, and deliberately putting on her glasses, she turned and looked at me. “Miss Louisa will flirt with a married man ; I have heard strange tales of her from Julia Horston, and, Sophy, I could tell you the most extraordinary stories . . .” The voice dropped.

“Not now, Aunt Arabella ! not now,” I cried, hastily ; “let us have prayers instead. It is half-past ten, and I know you like to have prayers for the servants whenever you can.”

Lady Arabella looked annoyed, but could not say no. When last I had stayed at Mineham, she had regretted each evening not being able to have prayers for the servants. Lady Arabella always spoke as if prayers were very necessary for the servants, but not perhaps quite so necessary for herself.

So we had prayers for the servants. Then I slipped off to bed. But Aunt Jane, who at home invariably went to bed with the Commentary fresh upon the top of her mind,—Aunt Jane, marvellous to relate ! continued to sit up with her talkative hostess. The prayers proved to be merely a short interlude in the midst of Lady Arabella’s overflowing gossip.

Aunt Jane would do at Mineham what she would not do anywhere else,—she felt so perfectly “safe” there. Lady Arabella’s “soundness” was a dogma she received. Aunt Jane never felt obliged to set a good example at Mineham : it was different in her own house, or in Sophy’s ! very different in Sophy’s !

Aunt Jane did not come up-stairs until after midnight. This is a fact. I heard her pass my door, and I looked at my watch. I noted the strange phenomenon as curiously as an astronomer might the passage of Venus. I was wide awake, for I had not gone to bed to sleep, but to think ;—to think of David from the hour I first met him ; to scan his conduct closely ; to recall his every word. I could remember his words as I remembered no other man’s or woman’s. An odious suspicion had entered my heart. Gossiping busybodies who try to fill us with jealous fancies, as if suspicion were a pleasant pastime for our mind, seem unaware it is a grievous pain to doubt, however little, those we love. I hated to doubt David’s disinterested affection. I told myself over and over again, I could not doubt it ; and yet what Lady Arabella had said about David’s disappoint-

ment and the £30,000, lingered like a stinging adder in my heart.

When, amidst the clutching greed which held disgusting revel in Uncle Sherbrook's house, I had mourned the poor man's death and his forgotten grave, I had felt really and truly glad that he had left me no money in his will,—nothing for me to grasp, now he was gone! nothing wherewith to pay me for my affection, as if it had been merchandise given him on speculation for hard cash. It had never entered my head to imagine David might have other feelings from mine. The cruel suspicion could never have been born of my own imagination. It was thrust into my mind against my will, and I tried to kill it quickly. "I searched the past, feeling sure I should find no food for it to live upon; but where I thought to starve, I fed. I found to my cost that suspicion can live and grow upon mere brooding. Then, it is true, what could not grow by day will grow apace by night. By night, the dimmest haze will take a shape and become a certainty, tormenting us by its irritating clearness.

Suspicion grew upon me in the dark, till it became a conviction, and, like a horrid nightmare, I felt powerless in its grasp. It was many a long hour before I fell asleep.

Sleep is an angel which stands between the terror of the night and the calm awakening of the morning. It stands with outspread wings shading the nightmare from our sight. I awoke to believe again in David's disinterested love, and with refreshed strength I steadfastly thrust aside the mean and painful doubt; yet I put it away from me knowingly. I could not quite forget the dream. There was a thought I kept from me at arm's length—a thought I determined not to ponder over any more.

I was glad to think I had only this one day to spend at Mineham,—very glad to know I should go home on the morrow and find David awaiting me. I tried to think of our happy meeting.

The whole livelong day I was occupied in manœuvring to avoid ~~a~~ tête-à-tête with Lady Arabella, for I saw she was set upon getting me quite to herself. She kept perpetually inventing little excuses—"By-the-by, Sophy, you would like to see the conservatory;" or else, "By-the-by, you would like to see the new leak in the cupola of the Chinese music-room." To my relief, Aunt Jane invariably exclaimed, "If Sophy goes, then I will go too." Luckily Aunt Jane stuck to one like glue, and was of all people the most difficult to get rid of, especially on a wet day. I was delighted to see the rain, as had it been fine

Lady Arabella might have carried me off in the chariot to cross-question me about David.

Perhaps it may seem odd that a lady, who prides herself upon her tact as if it were one of her personal attractions, should spend the greater part of a day in laying traps for a gossip upon the one subject which, of all others, tact should avoid. But this can only appear strange to those who have not studied the peculiar constitution of an elderly lady shut up in a solitary country house with a ton weight of gossiping letters, and without a soul to talk to for a whole century ! Lady Arabella was getting a little too old for visiting about from house to house in winter time, as she used to do in former days.

I could see plainly enough that Lady Arabella's numerous correspondents had written her a great deal of gossip about David's conduct, feelings, and affairs.

I artfully entangled David's inquisitive aunt in the complications of intermarriage. Aunt Jane helped me to make many valuable transitions. Thanks to her, we had Lord Studhorsey's grandmother's sister's husband, who was Lady Arabella's grandfather's cousin, over again. Lady Arabella, having once become entangled in intermarriage, could not disentangle herself.

I miraculously contrived to end the day without a *tête-à-tête*. Next morning I was delighted to see yesterday's rain had not poured itself out in the night, as I well knew Lady Arabella's complexion could not venture abroad in the damp, and I had feared I might have to drive alone with her in the chariot to the station.

My train did not start till past twelve, but I managed to be much occupied with my packing all the morning. Lady Arabella sent her maid several times to tell me she could see me in her bedroom. I invented an excuse each time, and by dexterous diplomacy, I finally contrived to put off saying good-bye until the carriage was actually waiting for me at the door. I ran into Lady Arabella's room, exclaiming, "I am off ! I am off !"

Her ladyship was still in her dressing-gown, though her head, like the gorgeous king of Israel and Judah, was arrayed in all its glory. Lady Arabella rose nimbly and embraced me : having clasped her arms round my neck, she did not unclasp them.

"It is very kind of you," said I—and I thought so with all my heart—"it is very kind of you to have Aunt Jane."

"Not at all ! not at all, my dear !" replied David's good-natured aunt ; "it is always a pleasure to have an old friend. I like having her, and I must have some one to talk to who

holds the same views as myself. *Du reste*, Sophy, I know David, and I know he would never go home to you and live in the same house as your Aunt Jane; and, my dear, I am particularly anxious for David to be . . .”

“Good-bye, Aunt Arabella!” cried I, hastily; “good-bye!” But her arms were firmly fastened round my neck. She had caught me, and she kept me, and she said her little say.

“David is a man who ought always to be with his own wife, for he is not safe with any one else. He is a born flirt, my dear . . .” The grasp was tightened, and the voice lowered, —“I give you kindly warning, *ma chère enfant*, so take it, and do not be angry.”

I felt Lady Arabella did mean kindly, but I thought hers was the kindness of the dentist who draws the wrong tooth. “I know you mean to be kind,” I said; “but good-bye! good-bye! or my train will be gone.”

Still there was no escape for me. Lady Arabella was only the more determined to hold me fast. She whispered eagerly into my ear; she whispered with the eagerness which fears it may never get so good a chance again: “Sophy, Sophy, take the advice of an old woman who has had some experience of life! When David flirts, flirt too, flirt violently, my dear, till you make him jealous. You are sure to succeed in the end!”

For a moment I was speechless from sheer amazement. I angrily, and even roughly, disengaged myself from Lady Arabella’s embrace. My voice returned to me, and I exclaimed passionately: “I abhor the vile idea! it is odious to every feeling that I have! No, no, Aunt Arabella, I will never fall so low as that; I will not stoop to infamy!” I cried out the word *infamy* with all the scorn of bitter detestation.

Never, never did I see any one look more astonished than Lady Arabella. “Good gracious, Sophy!” she exclaimed; “good gracious! Whoever could have thought you were strait-laced!” And she added, with a kind of naïve wonder, “Why, there am I; I have always held the strictest views, but they never prevented me from amusing myself in my own way when poor dear Charles amused himself in his! and it was solely by a judicious system of flirtation that I kept Charles straight! and, Sophy, Sophy, David is his uncle’s own nephew! so be advised . . .” But I ran away, for I had had quite enough of Lady Arabella’s sound advice.

There was more good advice awaiting me in the hall, but of another sort. Aunt Jane gave it me with her blessing. She advised me to keep punctual hours, and on no account to let

David omit the Commentary at either morning or evening prayers ; and she ended by wishing David were a more improving husband for me. " Well, Aunt Jane," said I, cheerfully, for I dreaded her tears, " at all events I am enabled to leave *you* with an improving companion."

" Oh, Sophy, Sophy ! " she answered, solemnly, " I always do feel spiritually refreshed by dear Lady Arabella's conversation, and I do wish you and David would take pattern by her. But you won't ! you won't ! I know you won't ! " And I left Aunt Jane sighing and groaning on the doorstep.

I had the whole chariot to my own reflections. I thought of Lady Arabella's extraordinary suggestion, and I did not forget she was the distinguished " Light " of a certain singularly pious set ; yet, my first surprise over, her advice appeared none the stranger to me for this. I knew Lady Arabella to be a good-natured, kindly woman of the world, brought up amongst women of the world who were patronising Sambo because he was the lion of their day. Accident had linked her to the blacks in her youth, and through the blacks to the extreme Low Church. I knew it was her social position and family connection which alone had made her a " Light."

I wondered had I held sound views if Lady Arabella would have given me the advice she did ; and I thought not. Though only a Light by accident, she has all the prejudices of a shining Light ; and I have often observed that Lights think a person must be " lost " who does not happen to profess the exact shade of opinion they imagine to be their own. Aunt Jane—a Light in her way !—considers Sophy to be capable of any crime ; and as to Lady Arabella, why I am sure she was convinced nothing could possibly shock a person like Sophy ! I can quite believe the idea of Sophy's being strait-laced had never entered her head.

Sound Lights seem to believe there can be no steady conviction of right and wrong without extreme " views." As if to steer a vessel it were best to stand on the masthead upon one toe, giving for a reason that you are nearer heaven than on deck.

A great many things which most Lights think sadly wicked, I don't even think wrong. I never went to but one ball in my youth, and then nobody cared to dance with me ; yet I see no harm in dancing, or in pleasant society, while I see a great deal of harm in shutting young people up in a strictly virtuous and morbid seclusion till you nearly send them melancholy mad, or else drive them to marry the very first person they meet who

hates your own "views." I am far from believing it is necessary to salvation to make life, still less religion, a bore. I see harm in tedious commentaries, in offensively affectionate tracts, and infinite harm in the peculiar language. I see infinite harm in all that can make religion either distasteful, or tiresome, or ludicrous, or vulgarly familiar, or blasphemous. I hate, too, a theology, whether it be high or low, which holds narrow, unsympathetic "views," and is always bothering about nasty little imperceptible sins and small pettifogging virtues. Let us be a little sinful or a little good without knowing it!

From living so much amongst "Lights" and morbidising in a strictly virtuous seclusion, I myself have got the habit of looking into every one and through every one to see what the man, and especially the woman, is made of. It has become a habit of mind with me, and I often do it without knowing it, and even to myself. Perhaps it is this trick of petty analysis, contracted whilst living in a nutshell, which has disgusted me with the smaller sins and lesser virtues. I am particularly irritated by the odds and ends of a petty virtue. There is a whole pack of little botherations I think neither wrong nor right, and this is the reason why my Aunts Jane and Arabella, and all Lights, are convinced I can have no good principles whatever. Yet the few things I do think right, I think very right; and the few I believe to be wrong, seem very wrong to me. I have concentrated my convictions of right and wrong upon a few clearly defined points. Thus I believe in the holiness of marriage,—I believe that whom God hath joined together, it is wicked in any way to put asunder. This is one of my few, but strong and very clear convictions.

Belief, fervent belief, is often born of the heart as well as of the mind. Thus none believe in God like those who love Him. Love believes twice over. I was convinced, and loved to be convinced, of the ever-binding nature and sanctity of the marriage tie. The idea of two lives blended for help and comfort, and mutual joy into one, seemed a thought of divine origin to me who had felt there was no satisfaction in life without sympathy of mind and heart, and some one to love better than myself.

In this my faith as to what God intended man and wife to be, I found an ideal that I loved. Any thought or action which debased this high ideal was most distasteful to me. The low trick of a husband exciting his wife's jealousy or the wife her husband's, destroyed to my mind the trust and beauty and noble dignity of married life. Flirtation, if at all real, I thought

wicked ; if unreal, it jarred with my ideal, and was to me a coarse, vile, vulgar thing. I saw no poetry in it, no high delight ; and by its side even cold and thankless duty suffering much, seemed beautiful.

I abhorred the notion Lady Arabella had tried to put into my mind. No one ever hated to have their few ideals sullied more than I do.

The intense loathing I felt for Lady Arabella's suggestion, produced a violent revulsion towards David within me. David's aunt could not have invented any better way of moving me strongly in his favour, or of wiping out her former hints. I was ashamed, even for a moment, to have entertained suspicion. I looked back with remorse and scorn on the unworthy doubts which I had weakly let enter my mind.

When I met David, I felt like a traitor ; for it was not until I saw him that I knew how much I loved him. I heard his voice again, and I believed in him with all my heart and soul. I could not firmly meet his eye for shame at having doubted him.

He said to me—" Sophy, you are quite shy with me ; as if I were a stranger ! Yet I think you and I have met before !" And he laughed heartily.

David was in pleasant spirits, and laid himself out to talk delightfully. He seemed to be repenting agreeably, for he declared it was a shame to have left me so long alone with Aunt Jane. At the same time, he appeared to be quite proud of his own admirable conduct in having returned to me, " for London is so awfully slow at this time of year." He said Mrs Clownton had bothered him to stay on longer in the north, but that he " could not stand that intriguing woman any longer." When I questioned him as to the cause of his dislike, he told me she was " rehearsing matches " for everybody, and I gathered that she was particularly engaged in making up a match behind the scenes for Louisa Clarke and a certain Mr Verrard.

" They don't seem to think," said David, " the Tankney affair will ever come off, and so much the better ! The girl does not care a straw for him ! How could she ? "

" Then," I replied, " if Louisa does not really intend to marry Mr Tankney, Mrs Clownton may perhaps be excused for thinking she might marry some one else." David declared it was the sort of fellow Mrs Clownton had chosen which made her conduct so outrageous ; and he gave me a lively description of a perfectly hateful man, and worked himself almost into a passion as he spoke. His anger surprised me, and I told him I

could not imagine why he went to the trouble of detesting this Mr Verrard. He then vowed he was perfectly indifferent to the fellow, who might marry Louisa for all he cared,—he did not care! not he! In fact, he contradicted himself flatly.

He quickly changed the conversation, and proceeded to give me an amusing account of the private theatricals; but I particularly remarked, though Louisa had acted the part of heroine in "Our Young Swells," that he barely mentioned her, and then not to praise her. I noticed this, and was ashamed to remember I had ever cast a jealous thought upon her. David was very amusing. His wit could make the most commonplace story an enchanting delight. It fascinated me all the more, because I had been infinitely bored for nearly three months. Until I heard David speak, I had feared with a great fear that I should have nothing to say to him. My spirits had felt broken and my intellects paralysed by being so much with Aunt Jane. I had feared my wearied mind could never grow young again, and I had dreaded David would find me hopelessly dull, and perhaps not like me as much as he used to do; but as I listened to him, the miracle which had taken place that first time at Mineham was performed once more. My mind awoke, and I grew young again. His wit inspired me, and I felt as if it were my own, for David has the art of making you feel you are as agreeable as he is. Enchanting delusion! Ah! thought I; one lively sinner in a house is worth ten righteous men, and twenty-five righteous women!

David talked; we both talked and we laughed; David certainly talked the most, or perhaps he would not have said to me as he did—"Well, Sophy, we have spent a very lively evening. You are the most agreeable person I know."

It was not until I heard him say these words, that I really knew how intensely I had dreaded I might bore him. To his surprise and mine, tears filled my voice, and I exclaimed—"Oh, Davie, Davie! never tire of me, but think me pleasant to the last!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

Notwithstanding her twenty-five correspondents, Lady Arabella showed she was not indifferent to the pleasure of securing a twenty-sixth. Although I had parted from her in anger, before

three days were past she forgot this and forgave me, and wrote to me affectionately, because she had news to tell me—news which could not interest any of the twenty-five as much as it could me. “Mrs Thunderbore,” she wrote, “has *just* been here. She could not stay a *moment*, and only *ran* into the house and *ran* out again, but she said she felt she *must* come and tell us the astounding report which is *all over* the county, and which *every one* has heard, and which *every one* is talking about. It was kind of her, *je l'avoue*, to rush off here immediately; but she said she knew poor dear Mrs Sherbrook would be dreadfully sorry to hear the news, so she thought the *sooner* she heard it the better. And indeed, your poor dear aunt is in a sad state, and can talk of *nothing* else. She says she thought Catherine Stewart was *so* attached to the place, and she gets *much* excited for fear the property should not be sold to a *truly* Christian landlord, and one her poor dear husband would thoroughly have approved of. *Du reste*, it seems one report says Catherine has *already sold* Sherbrook Hall, and another *contradicts* this, and a *third* declares Mr Rigardy-Wrenstone has persuaded my cousin Hartmoor to bid for the place, while a *fourth* states Sir John Moultrie has *actually* bought it by *private contract*. Mrs Thunderbore told us all these reports, because, she said, she thought we should like to know them; though, for *her part*, she believed the *only certain fact* in the whole matter is, that Catherine Stewart has put Sherbrook Hall up for sale, and intends to leave the county as soon as possible. Mrs Thunderbore said Mrs James Sherbrook told her Mrs Wrenstone won’t even *speak* to Catherine now. And I am *not* surprised! for whatever Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone may be, she is certainly a *perfectly honourable* woman, and I *know* she thinks Catherine has behaved in a *very unprincipled* manner. Not that Mrs Wrenstone could prevent Catherine from being received in the *best* houses if I were willing society should take her up; but, as you are aware, *ma chère*, I am *determined* society shall drop her, so the sooner she leaves the county *tant mieux pour elle!*”

David laughed very much at this. “So like Aunt Arabella!” he said; “but I would back your admirable Catherine to get into society and keep there in spite of my lady, if she wished it! She has plenty of money now, and is quite clever enough to entertain the right people in the right way. By Jove! I doubt if she will let herself be turned out of Dullshire, for the clever lady has taken a precious deal of trouble to get a footing there! She has been humbugging the county for the last ten years, and pretty hard work she has had, I should say.”

"All the same, she may be going, David. The admirable Catherine never pitches her tent upon unpleasant ground. I know her well!" I exclaimed; "she is a wonderful old general, and can camp afresh without casting a thought upon lost dykes and ditches."

David did not agree with me. He said regular campaigners hated to leave their old intrenchments. But I said—"She is not one of the common sort, David. On the contrary, I dare-say she already spies a new 'field' before her where more brilliant victories can be won than she has ever gained as yet. Oh! I can imagine how that eye of hers will open with her fortune! Now that she has got Sherbrook Hall, I know she will despise it and see beyond! I thoroughly believe she will sell the place, and take the money and be free. As to former friends, she will rather like being cut by them, for she won't care to flatter the smaller people any more. Catch her getting cooks for anybody now!"

Lady Arabella wrote me a second letter before I could answer her first. "Oh, David!" I exclaimed, on opening it, "something extraordinary must have happened. The letter is only two pages long!" I read—

"**MY DEAREST SOPHY,**—Come here immediately, *immediately!* Poor, dear Mrs Sherbrook says the *same* thing *over and over again!* and seems *strangely* excited. Dr Daly says it is the effect of the *shock*, and that she has a *threatening* of *paralysis*, but he thinks *with care* the attack may be *avoided*. If it *had been* *Hartmoor* or *Sir John*, she would not have taken the matter to heart like this. I think your Aunt Jane will only irritate David, so leave him *behind*, but make him promise *on his honour* to stay *quietly at home* while you are away. Tell him you will be back again in a few days.—Dearest Sophy, believe me to be, in great haste, your affectionate aunt,

ARABELLA SCOTT.

"**P.S.**—I see I have *accidentally* omitted to tell you it is a person called *Samuel Jones*, some sort of *Australian* brother of that pock-marked *Jack Jones*, the *farmer*, who has *bought* Sherbrook Hall!!! Sir John offered *exactly* the *same sum*, but they say Catherine closed with this Jones's offer *solely* to *pique* the *county people*, who *naturally* would have preferred *Sir John Moultrie*.—With love to David, your affectionate aunt,

ARABELLA SCOTT.

“P.S.—There is to be an *auction* at Sherbrook Hall to-morrow, and Mrs Thunderbore says *everything* is to be sold, even the *carriage horses*!—Your affectionate aunt,

“ARABELLA SCOTT.

“P.S.—I sent for Dr Daly *without* your aunt’s knowledge, but she will *not* see him again, and seems to have *no* faith in his system.—Yours affectionately, A. SCOTT.”

I agreed with Lady Arabella. Aunt Jane would irritate David. I could imagine how she would talk incessantly on the one subject which had possession of her poor brain!

Had Aunt Jane not maddened David when she was in her right senses, I thought he might have borne with her now: unfortunately she had proved so wrong-headed long ago! If she were now really paralysed, or quite foolish, I knew he would be very kind to her; but if only, as I expected, a little more irritating and tearful and huffy, and slightly more illogical than usual, I feared his pity for her would soon die, as it had died before. I could not bear to think he might dislike her in her debased sort of grief and feebleness.

I stood holding the letter in my hand, silently thinking these thoughts and feeling these fears. David had read the note with me. He broke the silence. I looked at him and listened. The instant I turned towards him he hesitated, stopped short, and said no more.

“What is it, David?” I asked, and, like a fool, half hoped he might say he could not let me go alone to Mineham, but would come too. I thought I should like to hear such words, merely for the pleasure they would give me.

“What is it, David?”

He still hesitated; then hemmed and hawed, and said—“Well . . . well . . . ahem! Look here, Sophy! . . . Well, perhaps . . . perhaps you had better read it yourself.” And he pulled a letter out of an inner coat-pocket: giving it to me he added—“It would only be for a clear day. You won’t be away long, and I should certainly be back to meet you.”

The letter was from Mrs Augustus Clownton: it was asking David to take the night mail “on the sly, if *necessary*,” and run down to Scotland just to act “Lord Chawles once more—only once more! The last representation of *Our Young Swells!* positively the last! The last, the very last appearance of Lord Chawles and the Honourable Gwendoline! Lady Clarcke,” wrote Mrs Clownton, “having taken Sir Henry up to town to

consult the doctors, we shall have the house to ourselves, and no *end of fun!* You must come! Now, positively, you *must!* No one can take your part, my dear Mr Scott, but *you!* You are *perfection—absolute perfection!* and you must manage, *no matter how*, to get leave."

I disliked the tone of this letter; however, I did not say so. I folded it up quietly, and gave it back to David. I asked—“Do you wish to go?”

“Well” . . . he answered, “ahem! rather awkward fix! no one to take my part!”

“I thought,” said I, “that you hated this Mrs Clownton?”

“By Jove, so I do! But I need not see any more of her than I like, . . . and . . . it’s . . . deuced awkward, Sophy, to stop the whole thing just because there is no fellow who can take your own part! deuced awkward! I should let them get any screw they could, if you were not going to Mineham; but as you are off, Sophy, I might as well be off too, instead of knocking about town all alone.”

“Have you only just got Mrs Clownton’s letter?” I asked, for I had noticed the date was old.

“Let me see!” cried David, as if he did not well remember; “was it yesterday I got it? No; now that I come to think, I must have got it two or three days ago. I . . . I did not show it to you before, did I?”

There was an embarrassment in David’s manner which struck me as very odd. I could not imagine why there should be any mystery or secret about Mrs Clownton’s letter. I looked at David in inquiring amazement. He seemed ashamed of something. Whilst my eyes thus questioned him, he got up, and standing before me, he looked with his brilliant eyes into mine. He took my hand and smiled. “Sophy,” said he, “what a fool I am to think you can ever believe anything but the real truth! I got the letter five days ago, and could not quite make up my mind to say no, and yet I was not such a heartless fellow as to say yes, and leave you, when we had hardly met again.”

“We had been a long time parted, David,” said I, clasping my other hand over his.

“Sophy,” he said, gravely, “I don’t care to go. I will stay here while you are away, and not go if you wish it. I know,” he added, smiling, “half the wives don’t like their husbands to go about without them, and, by Jove! perhaps they are right!”

I thought a minute. David’s hand still lay in both of mine. My upraised eyes saw nothing but kindly love looking down upon me with a clear, true gaze; and again my whole heart

believed in David. "Go, Davie, go," said I, gently. "There is perfect faith and trust between us. No mean thought must ever come to you or me."

David and I parted with these words living between us—he went to the North, and I to Mineham.

I found Aunt Jane exactly in the state I had expected. She dragged her leg, and spoke perhaps a little more indistinctly than usual, but I was glad to find that she was not as she had been that day we left Sherbrook Hall. There was no obliteration of memory; on the contrary, her mind was too excited, being nervously, tyrannically possessed by the fact that Sherbrook Hall, her home, and poor dear Edward's, was sold to a man who is "not a gentleman, Sophy! but only a brother of Jack Jones—and Edward never, never thought Jack Jones a gentleman at all—and Edward was such a proud man! oh, such a very proud man! and poor, poor dear Edward! what would he say? And, Sophy, I think Samuel Jones will buy in all the old furniture, and poor dear Edward's own arm-chair, which was always in the study, and mine too, and Edward's desk where he kept his most important papers, and Samuel Jones will be sure to buy the drawing-room chairs, and the round table in the middle of the room; and he will buy everything! and he won't care for anything! and I thought Catherine was so attached to the furniture, and she always admired the round table so much, because she often said she was just like me, and never could bear those sort of tables with claws underneath."

I saw the best chance of soothing Aunt Jane was to entice her mind to think about the auction, and I led her to hope I might possibly get the round table for her. I sent off an express messenger to Mr Jones, the attorney, begging him to buy it for me, as well as the drawing-room chairs, and the two arm-chairs, and the desk in Uncle Sherbrook's study. The hope of having these things once more engrossed my aunt's mind, and therefore weakened the hold of the first impression. Mrs Thunderbore had told her the news about the sale of Sherbrook Hall too suddenly—the shock had fixed the one idea in power, and paralysed all other thoughts.

The whole of the next day, from morning till night, Aunt Jane kept wondering about the auction, and went from hope to fear, and from fear to hope. If Samuel Jones did not buy the round table, she seemed to think the whole county would want to have it. Aunt Jane talked incessantly, and strange to say, Lady Arabella managed to talk also. I gave her one ear, and

Aunt Jane the other. Both ladies were delighted to have caught what looked like a listener. Lady Arabella kept up a little running stream about auctions and heirlooms, and old family places that were sold principally because the wrong people had married the wrong people, who in their turn had children who would not marry heiresses. Aunt Jane's flowing stream did not interfere with Lady Arabella's rivulet. The two ladies talked together, yet neither seemed aware of it. They did not speak loud—they really talked to themselves, but each one thought she was talking to me. I kept up the illusion with an occasional "indeed!" and a sympathetic nod of my head given first to the one and then to the other.

I was glad to find both aunts could talk together, as I had feared this might be impossible, and I should have felt much grieved had Lady Arabella been forced to keep silence. She did not deserve so great a trial, for her kindness to Aunt Jane could not be exceeded. She actually insisted the chairs and table should be brought from the auction to Mineham, though, fearing to inconvenience her, I had proposed they should be sent to Aunt Jane's house in Montagu Square. Lady Arabella said truly—"My dear Sophy, believe me, the mere sight of that table and those chairs will soothe poor dear Mrs Sherbrook's nervous excitement. I myself could not live without my old Chippendale—*c'est une passion!*"

Accordingly our kind hostess gave orders that the table and the chairs were to be brought into the house early in the morning, while Aunt Jane was still in bed. When my aunt came down-stairs on that memorable morning she found the chairs and the round table all arranged in Lady Arabella's drawing-room.

The study arm-chairs and the desk were placed during the forenoon in Aunt Jane's own bedroom.

My aunt's joy at the sight of the table without claws and the well-worn chairs was of a peculiar kind. It surprised me, for the first excitement over, she became quite silent. She examined the table minutely, and went down on her knees to feel the one straight leg, and to see if any of the casters underneath were lost. She then walked round the room slowly from chair to chair, examining each one. At last she chose the one chair in which she had sat every evening of her life at Sherbrook Hall. Aunt Jane liked always to sit in the same seat at the same hour, and so did Uncle Sherbrook. I think the custom became a part of the serious method of their life.

Aunt Jane now carried her own chair across the room—she

would not let me touch it. Notwithstanding her lameness, she would carry it herself. She put it at the left side of the fire, and exactly two yards from it. At Sherbrook Hall her chair used always to be placed two yards from the fender, and to the left of the fire. My aunt then sat down, and leaning back, she sighed and shut her eyes. She opened them again to fix them on the round table. She sighed and remained strangely contented for a full quarter of an hour. At last she said—"Sophy, Sherbrook Hall is certainly the driest house in England!" She sighed again. "The furniture is not a bit spoiled! It is just as it was when poor dear Edward died! There never could be so dry a house as Sherbrook! never! And, Sophy, the place used to agree with me so well, and with poor dear Edward too!" Again she sighed and relapsed into silence. She only broke it to say, "Sophy, that table is a wonderful improvement to the room!" Now, this it decidedly was not: it was ugly in itself, and was placed in too prominent a position. When Lady Arabella came down, just before luncheon, she wished to have it pushed more out of the way, but she saw, and it was easy to see it, that Aunt Jane felt aggrieved and pained; so Lady Arabella most good-naturedly let the eyesore remain where it was. She even seemed amused by Aunt Jane's contented contemplation of as ugly a piece of furniture as you could well see.

In a distant corner of the drawing-room, Lady Arabella had a considerable collection of improving little books, bound in red, in blue, and in bright-brown covers, all with gilt edges. She never read these books—nobody ever read them. They were presentation copies of various small discourses "printed by special desire;" poems "printed by special desire;" and tracts, more than half of which were merely Sambo bound in blue and gold, brown and gold, or red and gold—the rest were such things as 'Betsy-Anne's Way,' 'Manchester Moll's Dust-bin,' 'Liverpool Tom's Sunday Treat,' 'Blasphemous Jack's Revival,' 'The Costermonger's Call, or, the Tract in the Cabbage-Leaf.' These also were bound as Blasphemous Jack might have bound his books before his revival.

Aunt Jane had several times sanctified her knees with some of this sweetly precious literature while she took an afternoon or evening nap, so she knew of the existence of these little books. After luncheon she said she did not care to go out, but begged Lady Arabella would kindly allow her to "settle" her own table instead. The "settling" consisted in placing a little red book, a little blue book, a little brown book; a little red

book, a little blue book, a little brown book ; a little red book, a little blue book, a little brown book,—all round the table, till the frightful object looked exactly as it used to look at Sherbrook Hall.

In the hurry of leaving her old home, Aunt Jane had left her own 'Blasphemous Jacks' and 'Manchester Molls' behind her. She now sadly feared her little treasures had been sold ; she wondered what had been sold and what had not. She was dying to hear about the auction. Having found her tongue again, she wondered unceasingly on the inexhaustible subject ; while Lady Arabella wondered if Mrs Thunderbore would manage to find time "just to run in for half a second and tell us the news."

To the excitement and delight of both ladies, Mrs Thunderbore did at last find time to "run in," but only for two minutes. However, she managed to stay two hours.

Mrs Thunderbore is a worthy specimen of the second-rate clerical lady. She is a good woman, and is very kind to the poor ; and yet they tell me the poor think very little of her and of her kindness : she is liked, but certainly deserves to be more liked than she is.

From what I hear, Dullshire peasants are not naturally grateful : they are, too, a silent people, who respect silence as if it were a dignified virtue. Now I know poor Mrs Thunderbore goes through the parish talking volubly to every one, and giving everybody a quantity of sound advice about his or her affairs, temporal and spiritual, and both mixed up together : she smells bad smells, looks into cupboards, tastes food unasked, condemns the cookery, suggests improvements, and advises parents to correct their children more judiciously ; she runs in and out of the cottages in the most familiar way, and never sits down quietly anywhere, but is always trotting. She trots about in the queerest cut and very shortest petticoats, and wears a singularly ugly brown mushroom hat on her head, with rosettes over her ears, and brown strings, the worse for wear, under her chin. She has two little girls whom she dresses exactly in every respect like herself, rosettes and all ! Mrs Thunderbore considers rosettes "sensible ;" she is greatly afraid of the ear-ache, and would like to make the whole village dread it as much as she does.

When you meet her in Klipton, she looks as if she were a good heavy dogma, got loose from one of her husband's dull sermons, with two smaller but sound little dogmas at her heels.

On Sundays Mrs Thunderbore wears a brown bonnet, as like the mushroom hat as a bonnet can be to a hat: she sets a good example to the village. But the young women never look at her bonnet! They only look at Lady Arabella's. Lady Arabella is very popular in Klipton, and I fully believe much of her popularity is due to the reputation she has got of wearing her best bonnet in church.

Mrs Thunderbore has only two children. Lady Arabella says, "*Ma chère, elle n'a pas eu le temps d'en avoir d'autres.*" This is just one of the little remarks for which her ladyship considers the French language to have been especially invented.

Mrs Thunderbore never comes to Mineham unless she has some news to tell: she knows her mushroom hat and costume will not then be noticed. At other times I cannot help thinking the poor woman feels she is too great a figure to be quite acceptable to Lady Arabella. The mistress of Mineham particularly dislikes a very skimping skirt.

However, on the day I speak of, Mrs Thunderbore entered full of self-confidence. She did not even go to the trouble of undoing the clamps which caught up the back of her dress, half a mile above her old linsey petticoat. By the height of her dress I could always calculate the amount of gossip the good lady brought to Mineham, and this day I perceived there was no end to it!

Mrs Thunderbore protesting she could not stay two minutes, was in the midst of the auction before she had time to sit down. I drew a chair for her between Aunt Jane and Lady Arabella, and she took it unawares. There she sat, happily forgetful of her appearance, and quite at her ease, for Lady Arabella looked as much interested in the auction as Aunt Jane.

Mrs Thunderbore had been to the auction herself. She did not let her husband go—he was not to be trusted; his wife said the last time she had let him go to an auction, he had brought home an odd tong and an embroidered satin cushion: the tong was cheap, but the cushion was dear, and both were useless.

At the Sherbrook sale Mrs Thunderbore had bought the study carpet, the dining-room curtains, one of the dining-room sideboards, a wash-hand basin and jug, two new saucepans, and three old ones.

Aunt Jane was quite grieved to hear how little she had given for the curtains and carpet, the jug and basin, and even for the three old saucepans; the low price fetched by the new ones

shocked her! The sideboard was the only one of these purchases which my aunt could think at all a fair bargain.

"But I should have got the sideboard for half the sum," cried Mrs Thunderbore, "if it had not been for Mr Boggle, the attorney. Somebody told him I was buying the sideboard for you, Mrs Scott, and he bid against me! Every one said he ought to have been ashamed of himself, and so he ought! Why, Mrs Sherbrook, you would have got that round table there for nothing, only for Mr Boggle. He heard Mr Jones, the Harefield attorney, was buying it for Mrs Scott, so he ran up the price to double the right value."

"Scandalous impudence!" exclaimed Lady Arabella, indignantly. "But Aunt Jane said—"Indeed, Mrs Thunderbore, Sophy did not give a bit too much for the round table. It is a very valuable table! very! and Mr Boggle knows it is, because he is a very clever man, and I think he was quite right not to let your sideboard go for nothing, especially as poor dear Edward's green bear is painted all over it." I saw Mr Boggle had risen immensely in Aunt Jane's favour. Had he but doubled the price of the carpet and dining-room curtains, I think he might actually have become a "poor dear"!

Mrs Thunderbore and Lady Arabella looked at Aunt Jane in much amazement; she puzzled them greatly. But Mrs Thunderbore was accustomed to go through the parish and through life without clearly understanding most people or many things, so she recovered from her astonishment the first, and went on just as before, telling us who had bought this and who had bought that, and what the different things went for.

Aunt Jane was very minute in her inquiries. The technical power of Mrs Thunderbore's memory surprised me. She remembered every scrap of furniture, every little cup and saucer, and did not once forget the purchaser.

"Who bought my bedroom curtains?" asked Aunt Jane.

"Your old maid, Sarah Snipkins, Mrs Sherbrook."

"Snipkins always admired them! she always did!" exclaimed my aunt, looking pleased to think they had fallen to one who would appreciate them.

"They sold well," said Mrs Thunderbore; "Sarah Snipkins had to give quite a good price for them."

"Snipkins knew their value! Poor dear Snipkins!" sighed Aunt Jane. This exclamation renewed the surprise of both her listeners.

Mrs Thunderbore was again the first to pass over her astonishment and go on as before. Her voluble memory seemed to

have no end. The "two minutes" grew into an hour. The first hour was fast becoming a second, and yet Mrs Thunderbore talked on! She not only remembered what had been sold at the auction and who had bought it, but also recollected the personal history of the purchaser: in this personal and family history Lady Arabella invariably joined.

Mrs Thunderbore knew why most of the purchasers bought what they did buy, and did not buy something else. Aunt Jane was much interested to hear why Snipkins had bought the curtains. Mrs Thunderbore said Snipkins was reported to be a lady of fortune, who intended retiring to a house of her own. Aunt Jane wondered where she would live, and supposed she would live in Harefield or in Vottingham.

"Oh, dear no! dear no! Mrs Sherbrook! my housemaid tells me it is said in Harefield that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart has promised Sarah Snipkins £200 a-year, on condition that she settles somewhere quite away from Dullshire. They say Mrs Stewart is afraid of her gossiping about important matters to neighbours, who, having the clue, might understand her."

"Indeed," said Aunt Jane, warmly, "Snipkins never gossiped to any one! never! and she was always exceedingly useful to me, and had her Bible at her finger-ends, and always gave me the right things at the right time, and never gave me my cuffs before my collar, and poor dear Snipkins!—I get on very badly without her! and I never really feel comfortable, and Mrs Thunderbore, I always found her a perfectly honest, sober, trustworthy, Christian-minded woman."

The clergyman's wife pushed back her hat as if it prevented her seeing, and I had almost said, hearing, clearly. She gazed at Aunt Jane with wide-open eyes: she evidently heard a very different account of Snipkins from her housemaid.

I had great hopes astonishment might silence Mrs Thunderbore, and at last bring the "two minutes" visit to a close. Aunt Jane was getting over-excited. She had been much agitated at hearing all her old furniture, and "poor dear Edward's," had been sold as if it were worth nothing, and to people who would not care for it! There was much that touched me in Aunt Jane's love for her old carpets, and curtains, and sideboards, and teacups; even her funny way of idealising the table without claws, and the drawing-room chairs, had its pathetic side. I could understand, and therefore wellnigh share, an affection for ugly objects which had been companions in the happiest hours of life. I understood they might be like old friends, whose faces we forgot to criticise.

I wished Mrs Thunderbore to take leave and say no more. She had said enough. But the good lady had yet more to tell—she generally kept a rather important or interesting little bit to give out as a last word. It was a habit of hers.

“All the carriages were sold, Mrs Sherbrook!” she exclaimed, rising from her chair; “and Mrs Stewart even sold her mule-cart.”

“Who bought the close carriage?” asked my aunt.

“Samuel Jones,” was the answer.

“Samuel Jones!” repeated Aunt Jane, turning very red; “I wonder if *he* will use Edward’s crest and arms?”

Mrs Thunderbore said good-bye, and was half-way to the door, when she turned round, exclaiming—“Oh, Mrs Sherbrook! do you know Jack Jones bought that bay mare which poor Mr Sherbrook used to take such care of, and they say old Jack will drive her to market twice a-week, and that she will never be seen under a gentleman’s carriage again!”

To Mrs Thunderbore’s surprise—dismay!—Aunt Jane burst into tears. “He will kill the bay mare! he will kill her!” she sobbed; “she is very delicate, very! and poor dear Edward took such care of her, such care! and he always knew how she was, and so did Robert! And Jack Jones won’t mind if she is well or ill! he won’t mind! for he is not a gentleman. Poor dear Edward! what would he say? Sophy, what would your uncle say?”

“He will not know, Aunt Jane, dear,” said I; and I smiled, for at that moment I could see Uncle Sherbrook as he used to look, walking up the level hills on the Klipton road. “He will not hear of the bay mare where he is now, or care if the incessant trouble he took about that horse, like half the trouble we take in life, was all in vain!”

“You don’t care, Sophy!” sobbed my aunt; “you never cared about the bay mare, never! because you like to go full gallop everywhere!”

Though I had smiled, I did care, and, strange as it may seem, I could have cried! I was ashamed to feel the weakness, ashamed to weep, because everything my uncle had hoarded with careful worry had passed into the hands of callous strangers! Yet the thought that this should be so, now he was dead, touched me.

At the first outburst of Aunt Jane’s tears, Mrs Thunderbore had stood transfixed, and then had disappeared. She now came running back to the room carrying an overflowing glass of water, and she insisted Aunt Jane should drink it, drink it all,

drink every drop of it! while she made Lady Arabella hold a smelling bottle to my aunt's nostril, and desired me to chafe her hands. The water was upset, but Aunt Jane dried her tears a happier woman, for she was certainly a little pleased to have had a fit of hysterics which it took three people to cure. "I feel things more than most people," she said to Mrs Thunder bore, "and far more than Sophy, and I always did! I always did!"

She leant on Mrs Thunder bore's arm, and was placed by her in her own particular Sherbrook chair. The kindly goody-body then wiped the spilt water from the front of her own dress with the hem of her skirt. Lady Arabella's attention was drawn to Mrs Thunder bore's petticoats, and her ladyship visibly shud dered. Mrs Thunder bore immediately said good-bye.

With a short interval for dinner, Aunt Jane remained in her own chair all the evening. She was tired from excitement; so having sanctified her knee with one of the blue-and-gold little books from the round table, she fell quietly asleep.

"Poor dear Mrs Sherbrook!" exclaimed Lady Arabella in a kind of half whisper—a sort of whisper which sounded very much like a sigh of relief; "poor dear Mrs Sherbrook! she is asleep! so come, Sophy, and you and I will have a little chat together. Come nearer, my dear—nearer, just a little nearer, Sophy!"

I drew as near to her as she wished. She looked exceedingly astonished to see me so ready to chat with her. The truth is, I no longer cared what she might say to me about David. I had no fear of being disturbed by any suspicion she might try to give me, for my trust in David was a calm faith, a living joy within me, which no one but he himself could kill. I was actually glad to gossip with Lady Arabella,—even to gossip about David, if she liked it. I well knew a little gossip about near and dear relations pleases an old lady very much, and I was glad to be able to do anything, no matter what, which might please her. Her sympathetic kindness to Aunt Jane had made me quite fond of her.

With all her failings, and she has many of them, Lady Arabella is yet a very kind-hearted woman; one willing to be sympathetic, and caring enough for people to trouble her head about them, though, no doubt, she also cares to know a little more of their private affairs than may be altogether necessary for the satisfaction of mere Christian sympathy and charity. I confessed to myself that if you must live amongst *Lights*, the *Light* with the little vanities and humanities of life, would be

a pleasanter companion than the hardened saint, whose selfishness is often so cruelly unsympathetic. The little vanities are very human. We feel they are a bit of our own nature, so most of us find it easy to forgive them.

Since I had grown to like Lady Arabella, I could not find it in my heart to snub her curiosity, for although she does pride herself on her tact, and does not pride herself upon her natural inquisitiveness, I knew the curiosity was by far the stronger instinct of the two.

As a satisfaction to her own exquisite sense of tact, Lady Arabella approached the question she particularly wished to ask with an amusing amount of roundabout. Taking many turns in the air, her lengthening swoop brought her at last to the point with which she might just as well have begun, since I saw where she was coming all the time. She inquired affectionately for David's health, and then said, "David . . . David is . . . is not in London, my dear, is he? I think he is in Scotland."

"Yes; he is in Scotland."

"Staying with those Clarke girls and their . . . their rather questionable chaperon, Mrs Augustus Clownton?"

"Yes; he is staying with them."

There was a slight pause, and slight embarrassment on Lady Arabella's part: she fumbled in the velvet bag she wore attached to her waistband. "Sophy, I . . . I received a letter from Julia Horston this morning. She . . . she happens to be staying at the Clarckes."

"Indeed!" said I, but I gave Lady Arabella no encouragement.

"Perhaps . . . perhaps, Sophy, you had better read this letter." And she forced Miss Horston's letter into my hand. "There! there!" she said, pointing to the part I was to read. I saw,—"There is some very pretty love-making in the piece we are acting, and nothing can be more lifelike than the love-scene between your nephew Mr David Scott and Louisa Clarke. It is just as well he is married, my dear Lady Arabella, or the situation might be dangerous, as Louisa is the most perfect flirt in her own quiet style, and really Mr Scott is by no means such a very difficult man to flirt with. Louisa is by way of being engaged to that son of Lord Tankney's, but she does not care a bit for him, and he is always running after Lady Offaway, so no one expects the marriage will take place. Lady Clarke is in despair! and wants Louisa to marry Mr Verrard, the well-known 'Jim,' the great catch up here. Sir Henry objects to

the gentleman, as he has already been run away with by one married lady. Lady Clarcke has therefore taken Sir Henry up to town to *consult the doctors*, though I cannot see he has anything the matter with him. Mrs Clownton has been left here in charge of the match-making, and a wonderful match-maker she is! She declares she has *promised* Lady Clarcke that Louisa shall marry Mr Verrard, and she tells me she is under no end of obligations to Lady Clarcke, though she will not tell me what they are. I am dying to know! and I wonder if Lady Clarcke can give her money to chaperone her daughters while she is away. I am sure she gives her dresses, for Mrs Clownton always wears the most magnificent forty and fifty guinea gowns, and I know 'my poor Augustus,' as she calls Mr Clownton, will hardly give her a penny. Mrs Clownton tells Louisa to flirt with David Scott, so as to make Jim Verrard jealous. She wants her to make him *frightfully* jealous! She is afraid to tell Louisa to flirt with an unmarried man, for fear Louisa might take it into her head to marry the gentleman. Mrs Clownton told me all this *herself*. My dear Lady Arabella, she is an odd woman!" In returning this letter, I simply said nothing.

"Sophy," whispered Lady Arabella, "why did not you telegraph for me? for if you could not make David stay at home, perhaps I might have done so, my dear—I have some tact with young men." I replied that I had not tried to prevent David from going to Scotland.

"Not tried to prevent him, Sophy?"

"No," said I proudly, rising and drawing myself up to my full height,—"no! I told him to go. I wished him to go. I believe in David, Aunt Arabella; I trust him; I believe in him with all my heart and soul!"

Lady Arabella clasped her hands, and exclaimed in mingled disgust and despair, "Sophy, Sophy! I have seen that sort of romance tried in my youth, and it was not found to answer. You are mad! Yes, Sophy! you are mad!"

"Not mad now," I said; "but recovered from madness! I was mad, Aunt Arabella, ever for one moment to have doubted the man I love best in this world."

But Lady Arabella only repeated with angry vehemence, "Sophy, you are mad! You are mad!"

Her exclamations awoke Aunt Jane, who opened her eyes, asking, "Whose voice do I hear? Are they selling the bay mare?"

CHAPTER XLIV.

I left Mineham next day. David arrived in town the following morning.

It was with great delight that I met David. This time there was no cloud upon my joy, for my conscience was clear. My pleasure was increased by thinking that now, at last, we were going to spend a long life together. I foresaw no more separation awaiting us.

I was in so happy and joyful a state of mind myself, that I did not immediately perceive David was out of spirits. Indeed, at first, he talked to my talking, and laughed to my laughter, and I thought him just as agreeable as ever. But in a day or two, with wondering concern, I noticed an effort in his liveliness.

When the novelty of our meeting was over, he became absent, even silent. Once or twice, to my unspeakable astonishment, he was quite irritable, and irritable about a mere nothing. I handed him a letter one morning, and he angrily wished I would leave his letters alone. David's crossness startled me; though soon he made me wellnigh forget his hasty words, by repenting agreeably. Yet I took care not to give him his letters any more.

He generally left his letters tossing open about the house; but this letter, and one which he received some ten days afterwards, he put into his pocket immediately, and never alluded to. My curiosity was excited. I hate mysteries, especially in a small house where two people are perpetually thrown together: so I determined to ask David what high treason he was concocting, and who was his fellow-conspirator. Were I five minutes alone, I had asked him the question at least once in every minute, and with the greatest possible ease; yet the instant David came into the room, I found it the most difficult question in the whole world to ask. I could not ask it.

David was very irritable for some days after he received the second letter. All sorts of unexpected little things annoyed him. He was in a fault-finding humour, and his eye seemed to perceive and be disgusted by what it had seen till now without offence. The dress I had worn nearly every day during our honeymoon suddenly displeased his taste. He railed against the cut of it, against its colour. I laughed at him, only to discover he was more than half in earnest. He wondered I did not get a gown like one he rather oddly described; but when I

asked him where he had seen it, he said he hated to be cross-questioned about ladies' dresses, that he knew nothing about them, and that they were all the same to his eye ; he only knew when a lady looked well and when she did not ; he knew that no one looked well in an unbecoming dress ; and he said if a person had a big waist she ought not to wear a band round it ; and as he spoke, I saw him look at my belt. He had never noticed my waist before.

My waist irritated him, and then my hair. He wondered I did not dress it in a totally different manner : so to please him, I arranged it exactly after his description. Sad to say, I looked perfectly frightful ! I might just as well have simply braided my hair across my brow. I came under David's eye, feeling very nervous. He was quite put out at the look of me, and declared I had made a ridiculous caricature of his description. Ever after he let me dress my hair according to my own fashion, but he continued to find fault with the cut of all my dresses. At last I had not a single one which pleased him.

David is no actor. He clearly betrayed that some thought possessed him to which I was a stranger. I am not blind ; I wished I were ! for I had to see a change in him. It alarmed me. I could not understand it.

I asked David if he were in want of money, and found he was. I tried to think it must be money which alone preoccupied his mind. One moment I would be convinced it was ; the next I would think it could not be. David was not easy to understand in money matters. The want of money seemed rather to annoy than to weigh upon him. He thought it "deuced hard lines !" that a fellow who could spend a large fortune had not got it. So many fellows who had fortunes did not spend them. David wanted money in order to spend it—not for any other reason. He always talked as if there were something noble and generous in wishing for a large income, and some very remarkable sort of virtue in spending it when you had it ; . . . or indeed, perhaps, when you had not. He often said with much fervour, "Thank Heaven, I am no miser !" Certainly he had no tendency that way.

I admired his open-handed nature, but it puzzled me to think where all the money was to come from. I tortured my brain with arithmetic, I turned and twisted figures after every possible fashion, yet I could not make a little over £2000 a-year go as far as three or four. Since our marriage, David had spent more than our income. Aunt Jane's house and her expenses were not included in the calculation.

The oddest part of the matter was, that David spoke as if he had been miraculously economical.

I wished I had had more money to give him, for it put him in such good humour to dash about regardless of expense ! At times I could not help wondering, rather nervously, how he would ever manage to lead a quiet, inglorious, cheap sort of life. I was very anxious he should have some occupation which would tie him to his home—some profession, too, by which he might make money. I told him so. In the main he agreed with me ; but when we went fully into the matter, I discovered it was no easy thing to find a profession for a man who only felt himself suited to a great career. The long, painfully obscure drudgery of most professions—of the bar, for instance—is unsuited to a born Prime Minister. David's taste is for political distinction. Should necessity ever persuade him to take up the bar, it will be rather as the future Prime Minister he will follow the profession, than as the predestined Lord Chancellor.

Whilst at college, David had rowed and ridden, and done little else, and yet he had been a first-class man in his own imagination, and in the imagination of the many friends who had clapped his speeches at the Union. He had never risked his reputation by going in for honours ; so he had remained the "man who might have taken any degree he liked." Hitherto David had received no intellectual shock in life, and this may be called a misfortune where a man is not certainly born to £20,000 a-year.

When David was just beginning to think of really doing something some day, an event occurred which increased his natural distaste for inglorious drudgery. Lord Clinchfisted lost the elder of his two remaining sons. It was Lady Arabella first heard the news, and wrote it to David. I should say she wrote it off the very moment it reached her. There was no trace of reflection in her naïve letter. She expressed her real thoughts exactly as they rushed into her mind. Lady Arabella did not say, I trust the other child may (*D. V.*) be spared to its parents. On the contrary, she said, "I am *sure* the other baby is not going to live. I hear this *de bon lieu*. My dearest David, what an extraordinary thing it would be if *après tout* you really were to come in for the title and estates ! Far be it from me to raise false hopes, but I have known such *very, very* extraordinary cases of the kind. Why, there is Hartmoor ! Who ever dreamt he would have the property when his father was the *fifth* son, and he himself his father's *second* boy ?"

Having heard one of the Clinchfisted babies was dead, I

could imagine how Lady Arabella would jump to the conclusion the other must certainly die. She did not care for these two little Scotts. She had never seen them; but she did care a great deal for David, and she was delighted to think the title and fortune he had wellnigh grasped half his life were now coming within his reach again. Her letter was not a wise one. It would have been far better not to have mentioned the second baby at all. David was greatly excited, and, poor fellow! he seemed much ashamed of his awakened hopes. David did not want the other little boy to die. He was too kind-hearted for that. He said, "Sophy, it is deuced unpleasant to have your prospects hanging on a death! even if it be only the death of a mere infant. Deuced unpleasant! A fellow feels like a murderer when the idea strikes him. By Jove! I wish Aunt Arabella had not put the notion into my head. Upon my soul, I wish she had not! It is not an easy one to get rid of, I can tell you, when a fellow has been brought up to the idea all his life!"

I implored David to settle his mind, take up a profession, and thrust the thought aside, declaring I was quite certain little Lord Scott fully intended to live. I stood up for the child's constitution. I said that sort of boy, born late into a family, all of whom are not particularly anxious for a direct heir, will often have a luck of his own which will make him thrive better in the end than he might do were he the only hope of a race with every one longing for him to live. I told David I firmly believed in the contrariety of constitution which enables a delicate child of the kind to struggle through the measles, scarlatina, and whooping-cough, till it comes of age, and cuts off the entail.

But no one seemed to believe in the child's constitution except myself. Rigardy-Wrenstone called, though he was only in London for a day! He astounded me by saying he could not pass through town without coming to see me. His glorified condescension and politeness were such that David said to me afterwards, with a queer sort of smile, "Sophy, that poor infant must be dying." Even I thought the baby must have got the croup.

A most unexpected visit from Lady Tutterton, a few days later, confirmed me in this idea; for I did not think my Lady Tuttut would have troubled herself to call had the child been in good health. Lady Tutterton is one of those extraordinary women who make a caricature of worldliness. Her visit amused me intensely, but I cannot say it flattered me. On the con-

trary, it rather offended my pride. I had found it easy enough to forget Lady Tutterton's rudeness, but I have not as yet forgotten, nor indeed forgiven, her sudden civility.

Some three weeks later, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was in town for a few days, and she too called on me. I received her—or him—whichever it may be! far more cordially than I had done either his husband or mother, because never for one instant did I entertain the idea that his visit was caused by the croup. I have not spared the Drill-sergeant; I have noted his little peculiarities of gait and manner; I have perhaps been rather hard on him because, when I was a lonely girl and longed so passionately for kind sympathy, I seemed to find in my nearest neighbour no soft woman, but only a military man. I am sorry though, very sorry, if I have been hard on him, poor fellow! for as a man, he has virtues it would be well that all women had: he is upright and sincere, honourable and truthful, and not mean, never mean! When Jumping Georgy came to see me, I did him full justice, and believed with all my heart that no one had died in the Clinchfisted family, or intended dying just then.

"How do you do, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?" said I; "I am glad to see you. Pray . . . pray take a chair."

"Thankee!" said Georgy shortly, and then was silent, dead silent! and so was I, for silence always came like a third person, and a chilling and unwelcome one, to sit between my cousin's wife and me.

"It is a fine day," I said at last, but my *fine day* brought no reply. At length Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone spoke: "Sophy, you were at Mineham not long ago: time of the auction! Why . . ." But she came to an abrupt full stop, and put up her glass and put it down again. There was an uncomfortable awkwardness about her which made me feel awkward too. "Why . . ." She turned her shoulder to me, and not her face. "Why did not you come and see me, Sophy? Could have driven over. Lady Arabella would have lent you the chariot."

"The idea never entered my head!" I exclaimed in great surprise, before I knew what I said. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone is a person to whom you tell the truth instinctively: it can only be upon consideration that you would ever think of saying anything else.

"Like people to come, Sophy," she said; "awfully lonely at the Abbey! Like anybody to come and see me now!"

The unflattering *anybody* amused me. I could not help laughing a little at the characteristic turn of the speech, and I

cried, "For want of company welcome trumpery! So you think anybody better than nobody? Ah! we are very different, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, for I think nobody infinitely better than anybody." Laughter irritates Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone. She does not understand it. Little things rarely amuse her. Jerking round her shoulder till she quite turned her back to me, she exclaimed passionately, "He . . . he is away half his time. She . . . she is always asking him to Manyfields." I guessed who *he* was. We had been sitting far apart. An impulse I could not well explain made me rise and take a chair beside hers.

"I never thought you could have cared to see me," said I again, telling the exact truth; "had I thought so, I should have gone to see you." And I added, somewhat timidly, "It would have pleased me to go and see you." I was perfectly sincere in saying this. Although I was quite, quite sure she had no real cause whatever for uneasiness, it was a feeling I could understand and pity; and from that moment Jumping Georgy was no longer to me a strange creature with whom I could never feel akin.

I could have taken her hand in mine and sat with her as women sit together in unrestrained sympathy, had she not kept that forbidding shoulder still turned towards me. She did not speak at first; I said nothing either. I did not like to talk to her of that goosey being, her husband, though he is merely a harmless, a perfectly harmless gander, cackling through life with his head cocked crooked, for fear she might perceive I had heard silly gossip about him from Lady Arabella.

The silence became uncomfortable. I spoke of the weather, and again found it an eminently unsuccessful topic. Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone seemed incapable of making a remark. I tried every subject I could think of, getting only an odd "Thankee!" now and then to encourage, or rather to discourage me. I even inquired for Miss Warbattle, but merely got, "Quite well, thankee!"

"Musical people," I remarked, "must be interested to hear of the great Elmer-Elmer and Studhorsey match?" I said this, making sure of an answer, but lo, and behold! Jumping Georgy merely shrugged her shoulders! And yet she sat on! I could not imagine what possessed her to stay, and wondered why she did not go away when she had nothing more to say. Just when I thought she had grown into her chair like some kind of long seedling taking root, without speech or sound, she startled me by facing me suddenly, eyeglass in eye,—"Sophy,

I've something to say to you. That's . . . that's why I am staying so long. Very awkward! Hope you won't be angry, but . . . but people are so queer . . . so queer about their husbands." Her manner, and the unexpected explosion of her speech, amused me so that I laughed again. I could not help it! As before, laughter annoyed and disconcerted her.

"You laugh at me, Sophy," she said angrily; "but it's . . . it's very difficult to say what one wants—very difficult to tell a wife about her husband. But if . . . if nobody will tell you, how can you know till it's too late? People wish they had been told in time!" She dashed her head back like a restive horse, exclaiming, "How can they know if nobody will tell them?"

"True enough, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone," said I; "if a wife had no lady friends, she would hear no ill of her husband."

Jumping Georgy surveyed me through her eyeglass, looking, it would seem, for a meaning in my words she had not heard. She said nothing, not a syllable! and she had a kind of awkward, stopped-short look about her, which made you think perhaps she would never speak again, but sit on, a sort of transfixed eyeglass, for the rest of her existence.

As I had no fear of believing any story she might tell me of David, I thought I should like to know what she had heard; so I asked—"Well, now, what has David been doing? Tell me what you hear of that shocking man?" With an effort, a very great effort, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone broke the spell of silent transfixion which had bound her. Dropping her glass and looking down, she said quite nervously, and not in the least like a drill-sergeant, "Louisa . . . Louisa Clarke is . . . is flirting. She is flirting awfully with . . . with your husband!"

"Dear me! And is that all?" cried I, feigning great disappointment.

She repeated indignantly, "All? all? And what more do you want, Sophy?"

"Something no kind friend has told me before. I knew that long ago!"

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone jumped up from her seat as if she meant to say good-bye. We shook hands. She grasped my hand warmly. She surprised me. "Sophy," said she, almost gently, but she turned her head quite the other way, "Louisa . . . she is my cousin. Been a great deal with me. I know her. She . . . she used to like your husband very much long ago."

"But every one likes David," I replied with much self-possession; "he is so agreeable! No one ever was so pleasant as

he! If I once began to be jealous of all the people who must fall in love with him, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone, I should have to be jealous of the whole world!" And I smiled at the idea; but it was a smile that somehow cost me a slight effort.

Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone bit her lip, and seemed uncertain whether to go or stay. She was silent. I was silent too; and, strange to say, she seemed to feel snubbed by my silence. She reddened, turned, walked quickly towards the door, stepping very high. At the last moment, when I thought her gone, she gave that funny right-about-left twist of hers, came back, faced me, and said impulsively, "Sophy, I meant to be kind."

I believed her, and said to her, "You did mean to be kind. Yes, I know you did." I got a "Thankee, Sophy," in reply. There was a cordiality in the *Thankee* which surprised me.

I thought Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone was certainly going now, yet she remained standing about three paces from the door. She stood the very picture of awkwardness. She has something more to say, thought I, but for the very life of her she can't manage to say it! I asked, "What is it, Mrs Rigardy-Wrenstone?"

She blurted out, "Nothing!" and reddened violently. "I am off!" she cried; "paid you a visitation!" She astonished me by kissing me affectionately, and was gone.

When left to myself, I felt what I had once felt before, that I liked this . . . this woman; for, regiments apart, she may perhaps be a woman after all—a woman who wants imagination. I have said it before; I repeat it again—it is solely imagination that she wants. Doubtless it was the pain in her own heart which enabled her to divine a pain in mine, and so to invent the idea of having sympathy with me. She could not have done this had she been quite happy herself. I know it is the power to invent, and not kindness of heart, she wants; instinct has told me so.

From henceforth I shall look upon Jumping Georgy as upon one whom I shall like to call a friend—one even to whom I might go in trouble, if the trouble were a pain she had felt herself.

When once Easter was over, and people came up to town, a great many cards were left at our house; and David and I were overwhelmed with invitations to parties of all sorts. Many of these invitations were from people my husband had not even seen since Lord Clinchfisted's wedding-day. These people had merely forgotten David. They now remembered him.

People who had never known David before, wished to know

him now. Mrs Clownton's friend, Mrs Stourton, insisted (Mrs Clownton told David) on being introduced to him. Mrs Stourton was constantly asking David to dine. She did not often ask me.

It was the first time I dined at Mrs Stourton's house that I met Louisa Clarke again. We met her and Mrs Clownton and Mr Verrard.

I am a very unlucky person when I dine out. Having a heavy face and a heavy figure, the hostess invariably seems to think I should prefer to be taken down by the dullest man in the room. As the company assemble I look around, and I generally can pick out the uninteresting dully I am sure to get.

I had picked out my gentleman; I had sighed over the two long hours I should have to pass at table with him; he had been duly presented to me; I had entirely exhausted the weather; and still we did not go down to dinner. We were waiting for some people whom our host declared were not coming. Mr Stourton proposed we should have dinner at once; but our hostess was more long-suffering, and felt perfectly certain her guests would arrive in two half-seconds. Mrs Stourton smiled, and said something to David I did not altogether hear. I only caught the words, "I am sure she will come, for you are to take her down, and she knows it! I told her so; and, Mr Scott, she thinks you the most agreeable man in London. Now, positively, she does!"

At length every one's patience was exhausted. Even my dully was moved to make a sententious remark on that virtue—punctuality.

Mr Stourton had actually rung for dinner before Mrs Augustus Clownton, Miss Clarke, and Mr Verrard were announced. Mrs Clownton made the merest apology for an excuse: "Now, really, London was getting so full, you know. Now, really, a person to be in time for anything, had to be in two places at the same moment! Now, positively, one really had. Such a bore!" Mrs Clownton "liked London when no one was there. Could always be in time for everything then!"

Our host had already marched away with Lady de Gguylatthe, his predestined dowager.

Mrs Stourton asked Mr Verrard to take down Mrs Clownton. I saw David offer his arm to Louisa Clarke. My dully and I followed David and Louisa. Louisa tripped lightly before us. I noticed her sylph-like figure, and her tiny waist encircled by a silver band.

At table I found myself seated almost opposite David and

Louisa. Fortunately for me, my dully was hungry, and during the first few courses he was happily engaged eating his dinner. He read the *menu* attentively, and kept a serious eye on the dishes he liked best. The dinner being very late, some of the dishes were spoilt, and these little disappointments occupied his mind. On the whole, I was lucky in my dully, since he could entertain himself. Most dullies can't!

I was in no humour to entertain any one. I could only seem to listen. I could not talk. I was bewildered by the great, the unexpected change I perceived in Louisa. The change in her was a shock to me. I was alarmed to see her so quiet, so improved in style and manners. I was startled to find no trace in her of the awfully-awful young person I had heard loudly bandying horsey jokes with Mr Fred Tankney, and "splitting" at the word "ex-actly!"

She was again what she used to be long ago,—what she was that night of my first ball, when David had gazed at her with a look I had forgotten for years, but remembered now. I thought Louisa even more beautiful than I had thought her then. I was terribly frightened by her beauty. It moved me strangely, because I saw that it moved David. Her parted lips hardly spoke, yet she seemed to be a sort of inspiration to him, making him forget his absent ways, and the silent thought which had of late absorbed his mind when he and I sat at home together.

David will ever look with penetrating eyes at those to whom he speaks, so he kept looking at Louisa, and it was as he thus gazed that I heard his eloquence awake. The sound of his voice made me tremble; it gave me a thrill of pain, it seemed to wound me, and I wondered if all the long time David had been away from me he had spoken to Louisa in this voice, and had gazed at her as he now was gazing. The thought that he had surely done so, agitated me. The glass which I was carrying to my lips fell from my trembling hand, and was broken on my plate.

When all eyes must have been turned with surprise upon me, I was only conscious of Louisa's glance. I saw her smile. She whispered a few words to David, which made him look at me and laugh. His laughter hurt me.

From time to time during dinner Louisa would look up at me. I imagined she always looked at me when David seemed most inspired by her beauty. Her glance confused me, because I would feel as if my secret thoughts, those thoughts of which I was ashamed, rushed into my face and could be read there.

It was anguish and shame to me to doubt David ; but as I sat watching him, all the jealous thoughts which had ever been thrust into my mind returned to me, and I remembered each one of them. I went back to them, and they were now a well-built house to dwell in. The foundations of jealous suspicion had been dug beforehand, and I had gone away from them and had forgotten them, yet secretly the house was building all the time, and when of a sudden I returned to the stones laid down long ago, there were solid walls of strong conviction for me to dwell between,—to be imprisoned by ! For doubts are wide-open doors inviting escape, but intense conviction is barred and double-locked,—it is a jail ; there is no hope in it.

The pain within me was a dulled, a speechless one, for the shock I had received quite stunned me. I could feel neither anger nor hatred—only despair. And there is no despair like that which perfect conviction brings to us—the perfect conviction that a sure and certain misfortune has closed in upon us and upon one whom we love better than ourself. The closing in of a once foreseen misery is more terrible, because more intensely certain, than any sudden accident of new and startling wretchedness : we believe the second time as we never could the first.

I rose from table when the other ladies rose, but I felt no joy in thinking Louisa had left her place by David's side.

When I went up-stairs, I was relieved to find nobody cared to speak to me. I could not have talked. Faneying it my duty to do so, I tried once, and spoke to the young lady who happened to be sitting silent next me. I got a very short answer from her, and was thankful to see Miss Gwendoline de Gguyllatthe (pronounced Dellet) was particularly anxious not to make my acquaintance until she knew whom I might be. She seemed to take it for granted I could be no one, and appeared decidedly alarmed, as if I were quite a dangerous neighbour. She soon changed her seat, and was cordially welcomed to a place on the sofa, between Mrs Augustus Clownton and Lady Dartford. It was Louisa's place she accepted, and she did so as if she were paying Louisa a compliment. I saw she was not quite sure as yet that Louisa was exactly in "her set." Young as she is, you can instantly tell when Miss Gwendoline de Gguyllatthe entirely accepts a person as of her own set. In this respect she is her mother's typical daughter. Though Lady de Gguyllatthe was dining with the Stourtons, and was now letting herself be talked to by Mrs Stourton, I could see at a glance that she considered her hostess only partly and not quite in her

set ; so the task of conversing with her was a hard one for Mrs Stourton—it was like trying to be very friendly with a hedgehog

My silence was not noticed by any one, and I was glad of it. I had greatly feared Louisa might come and speak to me. I felt I could not command my voice to talk calmly with her about nothing, and I rejoiced to see her quite taken up listening to Miss de Gguyllathe, Mrs Clownton, and Lady Dartford. Although Louisa is by no means a talker, she looked longingly as if she would like to join in the conversation, but hardly dared. The Honourable Gwendoline de Gguyllathe, when she wishes it, has the knack of talking about her lady's-maid in a way which can make you feel her maid is in a different "set" from yours.

Miss de Gguyllathe complained of her maid to Mrs Clownton, who violently complained of hers. Lady Dartford also complained of her maid. Then the three ladies made complaints, the one to the other, of their dressmakers. Lady Dartford and Miss de Gguyllathe complained seriously. It struck me that Mrs Clownton did not—she seemed proud of her dressmaker's charges. This surprised me, because I was aware she had very little money. I heard her say—"Cérisé does what she likes with me ! I told her thirty was too much for a mere tea-gown, but what can one do ? Nobody fits like her, and one can't have one's things made anyhow, you know."

The next time the voices from the sofa caught my ear, the three ladies had passed (I cannot tell how) from thirty-guinea tea-gowns and fifty-guinea dresses to the church they were in the habit of patronising, decorating, and attending. They spoke of St Electra-the-Blessed as of a church decidedly in their "set." They declared every one went there now, and that nobody ever went anywhere else. Mrs Clownton remarked that she attended "early celebration" every morning of her life,—"and I always have to put on a good gown," she said, "for early as it is, one meets so many people one knows. I invariably meet the Lerekers and the Warbattles. The Duchess of Wildfire used always to be there, till she went over to Rome ; and I constantly see that Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart there,—that person, you know, who goes about with the Duchess, and sends out all her invitations."

Lady Dartford asked how it happened that Miss de Gguyllathe's cousin, Evelyn Shartris, was never to be seen now at the fashionable church. Miss de Gguyllathe answered that Evelyn's husband would insist on going to another church,—"St Electra is not at all in his line ! Why, my dear Lady Dartford, though he is married to my cousin, you know he was really no one !"

Louisa at length ventured to say she did *so* enjoy the services at St Electra's! She would not for the world go anywhere else, for she could not endure any other church! And she exclaimed, as the other ladies had done, that everybody went there now, and that nobody really ever went anywhere else.

Miss de Gguyllatthe did not snub Louisa's little effusion of fashionable sentiment, so Louisa looked pleased. She seemed quite satisfied with her success, and soon changed from her chair next Mrs Clownton's to one in front of the open door.

I saw her move, and I thought as David came up-stairs, he would see her awaiting him and would go and sit beside her. My heart beat at the thought. It was one which, like a kindling fire, brought me all to life. My indignation tingled and burned in my cheek. I hated Louisa.

David stood in the doorway. At that same moment Louisa rose and came walking slowly across the room towards me. The rustle of her skirts, sweeping from one end of the carpet to the other, attracted general attention. Even Lady de Gguyllatthe put up her eyeglass. Louisa's beauty is such that any woman who looks at her, looks again to criticise. Her graceful figure is always set off to the best advantage. Indeed, her dress is so arranged as to give you the impression that she has studied the beauties of her own figure. I know Louisa likes to be looked at. She will hold back her head, arching her long, white throat. She has a smiling way of appearing half-conscious of admiration, and quite unconscious of the possibility of any other feeling. No eye confuses that large soft one of hers.

Louisa came on smiling towards me, and took the empty seat next mine. All the chairs near me were empty, so she was not forced to take that one.

David had followed Louisa, walking just behind her train, and careful not to tread upon it. He looked amused at the length of it; not provoked, as, thought I, he would be with any dress of mine which lay trailing some three yards upon the ground.

When Louisa took the chair beside me, David seemed pleased, and said to me,—“Louisa tells me you and she are very old friends, Sophy.” They frequently called each other “Louisa” and “David” since the time they were engaged. These words were spoken kindly, as if David's instinctive sympathy told him I was ill at ease with him and Louisa, and he wished to make me feel at home. Had he spoken harshly, I could have answered him quickly enough with one of the commonplaces of society, but his voice moved me, because it was kind, and the

words I fain would have spoken gave no sound upon my lips, but confused me by their silence.

“Sophy is not a bit changed,” said Louisa, smiling, and turning her soft eyes upon me. I had only once seen any expression but that one in the blue vapour of her melting eyes. She spoke so that every one heard her, except the deaf Lady de Gguyllathe. The general attention Louisa had attracted was still fixed upon her. “Sophy never changes,” she said; “she always had the same nose, and the same cheeks, and she always was stout, you know.” This speech elicited an audible titter, and Lady de Gguyllathe insisted on being told what every one was laughing at. Lady de Gguyllathe is deaf, very deaf, but she is under the unalterable impression that she always hears perfectly well when people do not whisper, and she never forgives those who are rude enough to whisper in company. To avoid being considered a rude whisperer, Mrs Stourton was forced to repeat Louisa’s little speech.

David heard the words repeated, and so did I. I smiled to pass them off, but I felt the painful contrast which they drew between Louisa’s beauty and my own poor, ugly face—a face not made to touch the heart, and bring a dying love to life again. David looked from me to Louisa, then back to me. I trembled under his eye, for I thought that surely the sight of my reddening, jealous ugliness must quite kill his love, and even his pity.

But it was not so. David turned with an angry gesture from the girl whose beauty he admired, and bending down to me he whispered gently, tenderly, I thought, “Never mind her, Sophy,—never mind.”

I answered with a sob of sudden, overwhelming joy. There was something in his voice which made me feel as if all love for me had not quite left him yet; and the surprise of a great joy unnerved me. Oh, the shame of those tears! the shame of them! They mortified David. They put him in a painful, ludicrous position. I felt they did, and I saw Louisa’s smile of quiet triumph. David looked as if I had disgraced him.

Passionate jealousy, unknown to me, had choked my heart with bitter unwept tears, which now came, scalding my cheek, and making my joy feel to me like sorrow. Bowed down with shame, I said a quick good-night to Mrs Stourton, and left the room. I looked at no one.

David and I drove home in silence. I could not break the cold silence which grew between us.

I seemed conscious of it in my dreams, and I awoke to the

separating silence next day. This chilling reticence was so unlike David's usual impulsive openness. I thought I had never before known him shun any subject, and then I remembered how he had always avoided mentioning Louisa's name to me, even in his letters. This recollection added a vague, uneasy terror to my disquieting jealousy.

I made a painful effort to approach last night's humiliating scene. I would fain have tried to make David understand and forgive, if not pity, my emotion, but he snubbed me irritably, and said, "Let the matter drop, Sophy; I don't want to hear any more about it; only the next time you make a fool of yourself, don't make a fool of me too."

David left the house shortly after, saying he would lunch at his club, and would not be back till evening.

It was the truth in his bitter words which stung me. They were very bitter words for David to have spoken. But it was terribly true that I had made a fool of myself, and the worst kind of fool: the tearful woman, the hysterical jealous wife, was of all fools the one I had hitherto had the most contempt for. I felt lowered to the level of Aunt Jane. The thought that it was I who had made David a ridiculous laughing-stock to such people as the Stourtons and De Gguylathes, crushed all the pride within me, till it seemed to bleed with pain. I well knew the Stourtons and De Gguylathes were just the people to spread a ludicrous story at David's and my expense, and I felt how easy it would be for them to make their tale unutterably silly. I realised they would say my sudden burst of passionate emotion was entirely caused by Louisa's speech. "She always had exactly the same nose, and the same cheeks, and she always was stout, you know." I could have died of angry shame to think my tears should be ascribed to stupid words like these. The bitterness of the humiliation was more than I could bear.

But the cruellest pang of all lay in knowing—for I did know it—that I had turned David back again to Louisa, just when an impulse of noble generosity had moved him with a sort of love towards me. The thought that I had lost that love, and driven it farther from me than before, filled me with a self-reproaching torment, which would have maddened me had I not found relief in bitter hatred. The longing disappointment, the indignant, remorseful passion which confused and cruelly distracted me, grew into one strong, active hatred. I felt I had a right to hate Louisa. I felt it was she, she alone, who had estranged David from me,—who had blighted the joy of my

life, and from mere vanity ! spiteful, contemptible vanity ! I hated her cold-blooded, smiling love of personal admiration. I hardly blamed David ; I blamed her, so I hated her with the hatred I might have given to both. I remembered every look she had cast at David in my presence, and I saw her as she must have looked over and over again when I was far away and trusted her. Hatred swallowed up every other torment within me. It became a consolation to me, and I found real satisfaction in its passionate intensity.

I was alone all day.

David returned to a very late dinner. I had waited for him with a thousand eager words upon my lips, but when he did come I was speechless, because he was cold to me. His chilling, silent, hurtful manner gave me exquisite pain. At first it benumbed me ; then my heart grew full to overflowing.

There was almost complete silence between us at dinner. Afterwards, we sat quite silent in the drawing-room, until David suddenly startled me by speaking. He said to me crossly, "Surely, Sophy, you don't intend to go to the Stourtons' in that gown ?"

"The Stourtons' ?" I exclaimed, greatly astonished ; "we are not going there. You forget, David ; we refused. You said it was too much of a good thing to go there two nights running. Those were your own words. And," I added, with marked emphasis, "I agreed with them."

"I saw Mrs Stourton to-day, and promised I would go," said David, rising hastily. Though he did not say so, I seemed to hear in his voice that he had also met Louisa, and I felt sure it was she who had made him promise to go. I inquired, "Did they ask me too ?"

"They said nothing about you," replied David, carelessly ; "but no doubt they meant you to go if you liked it."

"When Louisa invited you to-day, and begged you, and pressed you to come," said I, trembling all over, "she did not mean me to go with you, David ; you know she did not."

"I said Mrs Stourton asked me," cried David, with growing passion ; "I never mentioned Louisa's name."

"No, no !" I answered, bitterly ; "you did not. But you met her all the same. You did, David, you did !"

"I did !" he said. His eyes flashed ; his anger would have silenced me at any other time.

"You mean to meet again, David," I said ; "you have settled it together, David,—you will meet her to-night ; you are going to the Stourtons' to meet her."

"I will meet her!" said David, in a voice I had never heard before; "I will meet her when I like. What harm is there in meeting her? I will go to the Stourtons' on purpose to meet her."

"Then I won't go!" said I, rising; "I won't go with you, David! I cannot bear to see her look at you."

"Well, stay at home," said he, roughly; "when a woman means to make a fool of herself, she had far better stay at home."

I went up very near to my husband, and laid my hand imploringly upon his arm,—"Oh, Davie, Davie, do not be cruel to me! I cannot bear to see her look at you; I cannot bear it! I can't bear it, Davie!" He shook off my hand, and left the room. He went away, and did not leave me one kind word, no, not one, to feed upon till he came back again.

I had thought I could not bear the sight of Louisa. Like a coward, I had let David go without me rather than see her meet him; yet now that I was alone, I saw no one but her. The vision of her beauty was before me. I hid my eyes, and only seemed to increase the power of my sight. My head was buried in my hands, yet I saw more vividly than my open eyes staring with all their might could have seen. The seeing mind is a fearful torment; you cannot turn away its gaze, or blind its sight, or find it rest and peace in darkness. There is no darkness for the mind which sees! Louisa stood before me. Every trifling detail of her dress and figure was clearly visible to me. I even saw her hair arranged as David had in vain wished me to wear mine. These petty details reminding me each one of some cross word of David's, of some pang of disappointment, irritated me painfully. I felt each beauty in Louisa as a cruel failure in myself.

Ever since I was sixteen, I had known I was ugly, but I had often forgotten it. On the whole, with a rare exception here and there, I had really troubled my head very little about my appearance, considering what that appearance is. But now that I found beauty was an inspiration to David, carrying him out of himself, changing him entirely,—now that I found loveliness of face and form was everything to him, and that by its side my whole heart's love, the worship of my soul, was nothing, only a bore,—I longed with passionate desire for the one gift which can bring joy to a woman, because it brings her love. This useless craving embittered me. I thought God had been cruel and unjust towards me: He had given me the nature which requires much love, and the face which kills it. Had He not been more

cruel to me in this than to the lowest animal ? for what creature is there, however vile, who poisons its own food itself ?

The more I dwelt upon my own hopeless ugliness, the more clearly did I see Louisa's beauty, and feel and understand its power. I saw her and David meet. I saw no one else, but they two alone. Her hand met David's, and lingered in his. I saw her eyes of melted blue upturned, softly beseeching . . . beseeching David for his love, thought I, and trembled. I had seen that look last night ; it had moved David, so I could not forget it. I thought it moved him now, as then. I seemed to feel it move him. I seemed to feel those eyes beseech him to sudden passion.

My heart beat fast, and I heard David speak in that voice which fills me, when I even think I hear it, with joy or pain. It is a voice to move a woman, and make her yield her soul, and at its bidding go to heaven or to hell.

I heard—I could have sworn I heard—David speak words of madness. Terror seized me, for I saw Louisa slowly, and with beseeching glance, raise her ever-smiling face, her cherry lips to his. With sudden inspiration he bent towards her, and I thought he left a burning kiss of wicked joy upon her lips, to sear them and brand them with infamy for life. For one short moment this infamy of hers, this stain upon her beauty, thrilled me with delicious pleasure. . . . And then I awoke to my own shame, not to hers ! to my own vile shame — my own misery and remorse.

I was frightened at the wickedness of my own mind. I was terrified by its horrid thoughts, unlike any other thoughts which had ever come to me before in all my life. It was as if the devil, in the frenzy of my jealousy, had snatched my mind from me unawares, and then had given it back to me defiled.

The twilight of a long day had merged into night. I preferred to sit on in the darkness ; I could bear remorseful, shame-reddening thoughts better in darkness than in the glare of light. I grieved for the injustice I had done David. I did not care enough about Louisa to think of her at all. I only thought of David, to whom I once had said, as if I were pledging him my word, " No mean thought must ever come to you or me." I asked myself if David had ever thought of me as I of him, could I forgive him ? And I knew I could not.

When carried too far by passion, as if by a greater wave beyond the surf of smaller ones, we are cast above the turmoil of the sea. We look unmoved upon the whirling current, which has no more power to drag us on. The man who kills, forgets

the passion in the deed he has done: the stab he gave has carried him beyond his rage; the current of his anger has passed on, and he is cast in contemplation high above it.

I forgot all else in the wrong with which my vile thoughts had dishonoured David. I loved him more than I could have done had I never been unjust towards him.

And so it came to pass when he and I met again next day that I was kind, very kind, and loving to him. I saw he was surprised; from his manner I am sure he expected me to be angry, and not kind. He did not know I had shamefully wronged him; he did not know I had thought more vilely of him than his worst enemy could think. Oh, David, David!

My heart yearned towards him. I said to him, "Davie, Davie, is there anything on earth I could do for you?" He only stared at me. I puzzled him. That was all! yet not even that for long. I soon became aware I was not a mystery worth unravelling; I was not worth the trouble of it!

CHAPTER XLV.

The great want in life is some one to love us, and whom we may love with unrestrained warmth. I have never had a brother, but I have observed the passionate love of the sister too often becomes the wife's bitter jealousy, and therefore is a delusion. There is a dearth of satisfying love on earth. Oh, that longing to be loved, and that necessity to love—are they not the curse of woman? The true curse of Eve, I think, because what curse could be more terrible to half the women in this world than that sad need of satisfying human affection? That incurable desire!

If only we could live careless of human love, how calm and happy we should be! But the yearning of the daughter, the sister, the wife, the mother, is born into this world with most of us, like a cruel disease. The parents die; the brother, if there be one, perhaps cares not for the sister's love; so then come the other two desires to eat up the heart, yet in devouring may be to find no satisfaction, only endless hunger. Starved or unrequited love will grow into gnawing pain, but will not die: so that it be strong enough to bear pain, and only

weak love cannot suffer, it would seem as if it could not die ! The curse lives on.

When I came to feel, to know, to be certain that I knew David did not really care for me, my love for him could not die. It lived on, a yearning, unsatisfied desire within me—a desire which could find no rest. I could not kill it. David's presence moved me ; his look, his voice disturbed my very soul. When he was away from me, I never forgot his absence. It grieved me to think ill of him. I excused him in my thoughts, until I persuaded myself there could be no real harm in him, but only in Louisa : it was she I blamed, and she I hated.

Ever since the night I had sillily betrayed my emotion at the Stourtons', Louisa seemed to take a fresh delight in flirting with David. She treated my unfortunate outburst of feeling as a remarkably good joke—a standard joke. She would come up to me, leaning on David's arm, and would ask me if she might be allowed to go down to supper with him. "I thought you might object, Sophy, and then you see one could not tell what might happen ! The consequences might be touching !"

And she would laugh, and David would laugh too. She seemed to have quite persuaded him I was a ridiculous sort of dowdy, old-fashioned, jealous wife, who would like to tie him up in a bag and keep him there, and let him speak to no one, and have no fun whatever. She had made David think it was great fun for her to flirt with him, and the most perfectly natural, harmless, right sort of fun : married people tied to each other in society were musty goody-bodies not fit for fashionable life !

David would go off laughing with Louisa, and I would not see him again the whole evening. The joke was one he liked : it amused him,—it put him in good humour. He had slipped into the habit of treating me, both in society and at home, with a sort of friendly indifference. This manner of his I knew was not unkind, yet it felt to me like cruelty.

But I had learned almost to conceal my feelings, because to show them would be to tease David, and worse, to make him despise me. I was resolved he never should have reason to be ashamed of me again. I was firmly, intensely determined he should be forced to respect me for my self-command, and that he should see I was no mere fool given up to hysterical jealousy and haggling reproach. Contempt, David's contempt, was a pain I could not bear.

I did not again refuse to go to any party with David. I had no wish to spend long evenings alone with my own

thoughts ; I dreaded them, for how could I tell where they might lead me ? So I went into society willingly enough, though I felt but little interest in any one I saw except in David and Louisa.

The people I met took perhaps more interest in me than I in them. They were mostly very civil to me—remarkably so, in fact. Even Lady de Gguyllatthe and Miss Gwendoline de Gguyllatthe came sailing from one side of a room to the other, on purpose, they said, to have the pleasure of being introduced to me. I had carefully kept away from them ; they were just the sort of ladies stuck all over by nature with crooked pins, whom you instinctively avoid. Their gracious affability surprised me. Miss de Gguyllatthe was not a bit afraid of me ; indeed she seemed entirely to have forgotten the alarm with which I had inspired her at the Stourtons'.

I could not understand these ladies in the least, till I happened to overhear the following little dialogue between the dowager and an elderly friend. Then I thought I understood them better.

“ Pray, my dear Lady de Gguyllatthe, who is that shortish lady in the blue dress you were talking to just now ? ”

“ I beg your pardon ? ”

“ Who is the lady in the blue dress you were talking to just now ? ”

“ I do not quite catch what you are saying, Lady Vellum.”

“ Who—is—the—person—in the—blue—dress ” (louder and louder)—“ you—were—talking to—just—now ? ”

“ Oh ! my dear Lady Vellum, you need not speak so loud. I am not deaf.”

Lady Vellum having duly apologised, Lady de Gguyllatthe told her the lady in the blue dress was Mrs David Scott.

“ Quite a nice person, I can assure you ! Why, my dear Lady Vellum, if anything should happen to the Clinchfisteds' wretchedly delicate little boy, Mr David Scott would be heir to the earldom, and he would come in for all the estates as well—they are entailed upon him. I know this for a fact.” Lady Vellum asked to be introduced to me.

The De Gguyllathes were not the only ladies who thought David and me “ quite nice people.” I often overheard the remark, “ Quite nice people, I do assure you ! ” But it was invariably followed by David's prospects, “ if anything should happen ”—that was the way every one expressed the idea,—“ if anything should happen ” to the Clinchfisted baby. I never heard any one say I was good, or kind, or agreeable, or clever,

so my head was not turned by suddenly becoming undoubtedly "a nice person." Besides, I not unfrequently found myself crushed into a doorway, or a corner, or behind an immovable chair, amidst the remarks of people who knew David, but to whom my appearance was not so well known. David had gone out a great deal into society a few years ago, at a time when *something had happened* to every direct heir in the Clinchfisted family, and the old Earl was not married to a young wife,—so people remembered David again.

The remarks I would be jammed amongst were not always very pleasant, or flattering, or comforting for me to hear, such as, "That poor Mr David Scott! They tell me he is married to such an awfully plain woman;" "Poor man! what possessed him to marry her?" "Money, my dear, money! and I am told he has not even got what he expected."

I would overhear quite lengthy conversations of this sort: "How that prettyish girl who goes about with that fast Mrs Clownton does flirt with that Mr David Scott!" "Never saw anything like it!" "They tell me all the gentlemen are wild about her." "Well, I am sure I don't see much to admire in her!—but then she is a regular gentleman's beauty." "Yes, indeed—a born flirt! However, she has rather good eyes." "And she knows it!" "They say she was in love with Mr Scott some years ago, and accepted him, and then threw him over, thinking she was going to make a better match; but I am told she did not like his marrying at all, and thought he ought to have gone on languishing *pour ses beaux yeux*. They say she still continues writing to him, and any one can see she has not stopped flirting with him." "I hear he is married to such a plain woman!" "Ah, poor man! you see when he married he had no prospects—positively none!" "Indeed? why I always thought if anything should happen . . ." "I know!—quite so! but there seemed no chance of such luck then." "What a pity, poor man!—had he only waited, he might have married any one!" "They say his wife is devoted to him." "Then he is to be pitied!—for she is sure to be fearfully jealous of him, and I suppose he does not care a straw for her." "How could he? poor man!"

Poor man!—always poor man! never poor woman! No word of pity for me ever reached my ear. It seemed to be taken for granted, as an understood certainty, that I could not have the feelings of other women because I had no beauty. Yet not a few of the ladies who said *poor man!* were plain enough themselves; so I was led to think many a lady must

fancy herself better looking than she is. They one and all spoke of me as right served,—indeed, as of a fool right served. “They say she was violently in love with him.” “And did she think he was in love with her?” “Do you know, they actually say she did!” “How utterly ridiculous! What a perfect idiot she must be!” “Well, at any rate, she must now know what it is to be adored!” “And she deserves it!” The lady who made this last remark, I must allow, was a very attractive-looking young creature.

There were other ladies who spoke of me as if I could even be considered lucky. “Mr Scott is just amusing himself—nothing more! I declare she is a very fortunate woman; for though he does not care for her—how could he?—he will never do anything outrageous. Indeed, all things considered, he is really the pink of propriety! for who could expect him to make love to his own wife? I hear she is a perfect fright!”

The unanimity of the opinion—she is in love with him, but he does not care for her; how could he?—terrified me. I saw no comfort anywhere. Long ago at Mineham, when Louisa was flirting with Mr Fred Tankney, I had most pitied David for having a rival so inferior to himself. But now that my own rival was superior to me in the one attraction—in the one virtue, I might call it!—of which alone the world seems to take account in women, it was her superiority which most enraged me. I had artistic sense enough myself to feel the power of her beauty. When I looked at her, I hated her; yet I, even I, could understand why David liked to gaze upon her face and form.

I tried to keep David away from the houses where he was certain to meet Louisa. I told him we had got into a fast set, and that I liked neither it nor Mrs Stourton. David agreed with me; yet he would go to the Stourtons' all the same. He would go wherever he thought he should meet Mrs Clownton and Louisa, for Louisa was always with Mrs Clownton: she told David her own mother was not going out at present, as her father was ill. David said Mrs Clownton was distantly related to Sir Henry Clarke, so it was quite the right thing for her to take out Louisa.

Mrs Stourton seemed to me to entertain Mrs Clownton's friends, and not her own. David himself only knew Mrs Stourton through Mrs Clownton. David told me Mrs Clownton issued Mrs Stourton's invitations, and sent them about with her own card. Mrs Stourton has a very big, handsomely furnished house, and Mrs Clownton has a very, very small one.

All the smart people (as they are called) went to these Clownton-Stourton entertainments, and I could not make out why, for they were almost rude to Mrs Stourton, and they, none of them, seemed to like Mrs Clownton. I never heard any one say a good word for her ; but they all said, "She goes everywhere !" There seemed to be some hidden virtue in *going everywhere*, which covered a multitude of sins.

Lady de Gguyllathe said to me : "Mrs Augustus Clownton is decidedly a queer person. She leaves her husband in the country, and declares the London season does not agree with him, so she takes that Mr Verrard about with her wherever she goes, and tells people he is intended for that Miss Clarcke, but . . . but, my dear, she need not imagine any one believes her. Really these fast ladies are shocking ! Yet what can you do ? You meet Mrs Clownton everywhere. I can assure you, she goes everywhere !"

Shortly afterwards I witnessed very cordial greetings between the Dowager Lady de Gguyllathe and the Hon^{ble}. Mrs Augustus Clownton. Her ladyship was even graciously pleased to acknowledge the existence of that Mr Verrard and of that "Miss Clarcke, who goes about everywhere with that Mrs Clownton." Fanny was there, too, that night, but Lady de Gguyllathe did not appear to recognise her as a person who *went everywhere*.

Fanny herself declared she went nowhere, positively nowhere ! She was delighted to see me, "because," said she, "I know no one ! positively no one ! I am here entirely by accident to-night. Mamma thinks Louisa quite a beauty, and only cares for her to go out. Julia and I positively go nowhere ! Mamma does not care to go out herself, for when she goes, papa will go too, and papa won't let her do what she likes, and he won't let her run after Mr Verrard ; besides, papa is so cross ! It is awfully hard lines ! He won't ask any one to the house, and he says all the men we know are awfully fast. He won't even ask that poor inoffensive Sir Harry Hardup, though I am sure he is a perfectly harmless little creature, only awfully amusing !"

Fanny was very outspoken by nature. She was just the same girl I had met at Mineham : she had not changed, like Louisa. There was a touch of Manyfields, and a good deal of the *awfully-awful*, about her still. "Papa is so cross ! so awfully cross !" she repeated ; "and he says mamma runs after people, and he won't let her ask Jim Verrard to dine, and he was awfully angry when he accidentally discovered Mrs Clownton and Jim Verrard had been staying with us in Scotland the time mamma took papa up to town to consult the doctors.

Mamma says papa is ill, but Julia and I don't think he is, only mamma persuades him not to go out, and she makes him take quinine pills, and go to bed early, and she stays at home herself; so we stay too, but she sends Louisa everywhere with Mrs Clownton, on purpose, we know, to meet Jim Verrard. Mamma is mad for Louisa to meet him. She thinks him an awfully good match!" Fanny dropped her voice: "Mamma is bent on the match, Sophy, but I don't think she will ever catch him, and Julia does not think so either." Fanny dropped her voice still lower: "Mrs Clownton likes to keep Jim Verrard dangling after herself. She always has a man of some kind dangling after her, and she does not mean to change Jim Verrard just yet, because he gives her such beautiful presents, and he is awfully good-looking. I know she does not want to change him yet! Mrs Clownton is awful fun, Sophy, awful! but very odd, awfully odd! I tell mamma she is awfully queer, but mamma won't believe me. You see mamma does not wish to believe me, Sophy, because she wants to send Louisa about with Mrs Clownton, for Mrs Clownton tells mamma she never lets Louisa speak to any unmarried man except Jim Verrard, and that is quite true, only . . ."—Fanny looked hard at me—"only . . . she does not tell mamma how well Louisa can flirt with a married one."

"By-the-by, Fanny," said I, as if I had not heard her last remark—"by-the by, that very fast-looking lady there with all those diamonds and that extremely low dress, is she really the Duchess of Wildfire? I heard some one say she is. I mean, Fanny, that particular Duchess of Wildfire who is separated from her husband? the one who has just gone over from the extreme High Church to Rome? the one who used to be so mad about the Christian Cossack?"

Fanny did not answer my question, but kept looking at me; and she laughed, and exclaimed, "You are quite too more than clever, Sophy, quite too more! But I am not going to let you turn the conversation like that! Don't be so awfully blushing and silly! You know Louisa is flirting outrageously with that foolish husband of yours—now you know she is, Sophy! and you ought to prevent it. You know everything and see everything, and there is no good in pretending you don't."

It would have been dignified for me to walk away in silence; but I am naturally inquisitive, and I thought, "Perhaps Fanny has something to say I have not heard before;" so I stayed to hear. I tried not to betray the slightest emotion, and answered with a kind of cold loftiness: "It is no harm for David to speak

to Louisa, or for Louisa to speak to him. They are old friends."

"No harm! no harm!" cried Fanny; "that is what every one says! but Sophy, Sophy, take care! she will estrange your husband. She is quite clever enough for that, and that is all she wants to do." And dropping her voice to a whisper, which was impressive because she generally spoke loudly, she said: "People who flirt with other people's husbands may have awfully large eyes, and be awfully pretty, and lisp like babies, and all that sort of thing, but they know quite well what they are doing. They know awfully well they are amusing themselves and teasing other people, especially if they are angry with them! and Louisa is awfully angry with you, Sophy, awfully! for she is quite sure David Scott is going to come in for the title and fortune, and she thinks you had no right to make such a good match, and, perhaps, if you were not married to David Scott now, she might marry him herself, because she knows Jim Verrard does not mean to propose, and she never really cared for Fred Tankney. Never! He was just put into her head, and she thought him a good catch!"

In my heart I believed all this of Louisa, but I instinctively exclaimed, I cannot tell why, "Nonsense, Fanny! nonsense!" as if I should like roughly to thrust the subject aside.

"You are exactly like everybody else, Sophy!" cried Fanny, in the voice and with the piqued manner of a person who is in the habit of feeling injured, and has just been injured again, and who really cannot stand this repeated injustice any longer. "You are exactly like everybody else! No one believes anything of Louisa! No one believes she is clever enough to be angry and spiteful! Everybody thinks her awfully amiable! awfully!—much more amiable than Julia or me; and they don't think her a bit fast now. Every one says she is quite changed, but she is not! She is just twice as fast as we are, and we know it, only hers is a deep-down, quiet sort of die-away fastness. The fast girls to be afraid of are not the awfully slangy ones!"

I interrupted Fanny's indignation to say, "Really, my dear Fanny, I had no idea of comparing . . ."

"But you think it all the same!" she cried; "every one thinks it! because Louisa has awfully big, swimmy sort of eyes, and can't talk, and never reads books, everybody thinks she is not one bit clever or spiteful, only awfully innocent; but Julia and I know she is very clever in her own way,—quite clever enough to flirt shockingly, and to do exactly what she wants;

and if people once admire her, she is awfully jealous if they admire any one else ; and poor Julia and I know she is not one bit kind about those sort of things,—not one bit !”

Fanny looked agitated, and got up and left me brusquely. I did not see her again that evening ; indeed, I have not seen her since. Louisa has since preferred to go out alone with Mrs Clownton.

Mrs Clownton continued to go *everywhere* every day of her life, until suddenly the theatrical passion took possession of her again ; and then she went nowhere ! positively nowhere ! for ten whole days.

During those ten days of everlasting rehearsal, I hardly saw David. Mrs Clownton “could not get on without him. He is perfection, my dear Mrs Scott, positive perfection ! You really must come to our grand night ; now, you really must ! I insist upon it ! but till then, take the advice of one who has some little practical experience of stage management, and keep away ! keep away from us, my dear Mrs Scott, keep away ! Avoid us like poison ! I never admit people to a rehearsal—it spoils the rehearsal for us, and the play for them. We should disgust you, my dear Mrs Scott, positively disgust you ! Now, I know we should !” and she again repeated, “Take my advice, and keep away from us, my dear Mrs Scott, keep away !” This repetition was quite unnecessary. I could not possibly have done anything else but keep away from her house, when she refused, “positively refused,” to invite me inside her doors.

If she had kept David rehearsing all day long, and had not even let him come home to dinner, Mrs Clownton would send me a very particular message, bidding me on no account forget I was engaged to her for the “grand night,” and she would tell David to say she never could or would forgive me if I accepted any other engagement for that evening.

When at last the great day had come, that very afternoon, the very afternoon of her “grand night,” Mrs Clownton wrote to me in “despair, in positive, perfect despair !” saying she was scandalised and horrified, and really did not know how to tell me, but she had just, “only just” discovered that she had done *the* most shocking thing, in fact, *the* most dreadful thing in the whole world which she possibly could do—she had asked more people than her wretched, tiny, little mousehole of a room could under *any* circumstances be made to hold ! “My dear Mrs Scott, *every one* insists on coming, and so *few* people are good-natured ! I have written to every creature I *dare* put off.” She declared she would not think of writing to me, only I was

so *very* good-natured, and not a bit huffy! so utterly unlike other people! She said, moreover, that she was *perfectly* certain I would understand *everything!* and *forgive* her, and even *pity* her!

This was a mistake, for I did not understand her, and I certainly did not pity her, neither did I quite forgive her. I had an uneasy suspicion that her letter was all a pretence, and that for some reason or other she did not want me to see her and Mr Verrard, and David and Lousia, acting proposals together.

David was not by when I received Mrs Clownton's letter. I did not get it until five o'clock in the afternoon, and David had gone off immediately after luncheon to rehearse his part once more, and to dine early with the other amateur actors and actresses.

While I sat at home by myself that evening, the idea struck me, could David have had any part in Mrs Clownton's letter? could he, my own husband, have wished me to be kept away? The idea was like a cruel stab to me. I loved David too well not to thrust the thought aside; but in passing, it had left a wound. I remembered, and could not forget it.

"David," said I next day, when we two were together once more—"David . . ." I could not look him in the face, for shame had seized me. Yet I would ask the question I was ashamed to ask. "David," I said, in a low, imploring voice—"David, did you see Mrs Clownton's letter?"

I got no answer. In painful, nervous dread, I looked at him, and saw he had not even heard me! He sat with a hand in each pocket, and his legs stretched out, the very picture of boredom. I watched him. He hardly seemed aware of my presence. He was whistling absently. His careless, abstracted air annoyed me. "David," I exclaimed, rather sharply; "did you see Mrs Clownton's letter yesterday?"

David yawned. "What letter?" he asked, lazily, as if he took no interest in the matter. He yawned a second time. He seemed dead tired after last night's excitement.

"What letter, David?" I repeated; "why, Mrs Clownton's letter. The letter saying she had no room for me."

"No room where?" asked David, gaping again.

"Where? where? Oh, David, how can you ask? You know I was not at Mrs Clownton's party last night. You know I was not. You know she pretended there was no room for me."

David sat straight upright. A look of unfeigned surprise crossed his face. "Why, Sophy," said he, "I thought you

were one of my audience,—I made sure you were. By Jove! is it possible you never came after all?" And laughing, as if much amused, he added, "And there was I, so careful to act like the discreet married man whose wife was looking at him! By rights, I ought to have embraced the heroine in the last act! upon my soul, I ought! And I did not! I did not half do my dramatic lover's part! Not half! I left out no end of little points!"

Never, never till I die shall I forget the dull thud of disappointment I felt at these careless words. I thought I should have preferred, a hundred times preferred, any deceit, any trick, which showed my husband had at least been thinking of me, to this oblivion. He had not even noticed my absence! Yet, when he was away from me, I always missed him. Where many were present, my eyes searched first for him, and I felt alone until I found him.

I was not angry with David—there is quickening life, there is almost hope in anger. In disappointment there is no hope. This cold dulness stayed the flow of my warm blood, and chilled me to the heart.

David did not even perceive his words had hurt me. There was a time when I had found him the most sympathetic of men—the only human being in this cold world who seemed to divine my thoughts and feel with me; and where was this instinct of kind sympathy now? Was it dead and gone for ever? or was David still a sympathetic man, but in sympathy with the wrong woman? We sat in the same room together, and yet were far apart. It was as if a gulf had opened between us, and he lived at one side and I alone at the other. He was moodily absent, engrossed in thoughts he would not speak.

From time to time he would shake off the absent fit with visible effort, and then he would want to be amused, and ask me why I was so dull. I would try to talk to him, but I seemed to have nothing to say, and he did not help me. My attempts at conversation fell heavily; they were a failure. I bored David. Had he cared to talk himself, as of old, his wit might have inspired me. But no subject moved him now. He seemed to have forgotten the ambition of his earlier days, and I saw this indifference with pain. I had so loved to hear his eloquence, and to see him fired by enthusiasm for great things! Now he preferred to sit silent.

I wondered he cared to stay at home, as he found me dull, and himself dull too; but a change had come over him

since Mrs Clownton's theatricals. He refused to go anywhere, and said he was sick of society. He was angry with me because I reminded him of an invitation he had accepted to the Stourtons', and declared he would not go to their house, as he would certainly meet "that odious Mrs Clownton there."

Something had certainly happened on Mrs Clownton's "grand night," but what it was I could not discover. When I asked David more particularly about the theatricals, he said he hated to be cross-questioned—"Every fellow hates it, Sophy! It is the one habit a man can't endure in his wife."

I was silenced. David had spoken crossly, and I saw he thought so himself; but he only appeared the more irritated by the consciousness of his own harshness. David had lost the art of repenting agreeably.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Some eight or nine days after the theatricals, David threw off his moody fit. The coolness between him and Mrs Clownton suddenly ceased. He began to go out again, and became quite lively, even talkative. "By-the-by, Sophy," he said to me, "I do not think I ever told you whom I met at Mrs Clownton's the night of our theatricals. I have intended telling you a hundred times since, and, by Jove! I have always forgotten it! I say, Sophy, you will never guess who she was, so I will just tell you—I met your admirable Catherine! and the admirable Catherine was frightfully civil to me, and would not let me cut her. She managed to shake hands with me before I realised who she was,—upon my soul, she did! and no wonder I did not know her!" David laughed heartily. "She was got up in great style," he cried; "low neck, and all that sort of thing! None of the pious dowdy about her, I can tell you! She praised up our acting, and was no more scandalised by the theatricals than if she had never lived under the same roof as your Aunt Jane."

"Oh, David!" I said, a little reproachfully, "how could you forget to tell me you had met her?"

"Went clean out of my head! clean out of my head!" he exclaimed.

"Will she always be at Mrs Clownton's and at the Stourtons'

when we go there?" I asked, eagerly. I thought with horror of her eye turning from David and Louisa to look cruelly upon me. I could feel that eye penetrating my secret grief, and hear that rasping voice publishing my sad misfortune to the world. "I shall hate to meet her, David," said I; "how does Mrs Clownton come to know her?"

"I am not sure she does know her, Sophy," he answered; "it was the Duchess of Wildfire brought her that night. She goes everywhere with the duchess, even to chapel, I am told. Do you know, Sophy, all the world declares your admirable Catherine has turned Roman Catholic." For an instant I felt the surprise any piece of news, even expected news, excites before we have time to realise it; but a moment's reflection was enough. I said, "David, I am not really surprised. Under the circumstances, this was the admirable Catherine's natural end. The monsignors will be beautifully civil to her, and a great many grand ladies will instantly take her up. She will suit them all to perfection!"

"Write and tell your Aunt Jane!" exclaimed David; "write and tell her the news, Sophy! By Jove! what a fuss there will be! How she and Aunt Arabella will both talk and talk together! As for your Aunt Jane, she will talk on the subject unceasingly for the next two years!" David laughed heartily—he was in high good humour again.

I lost no time in writing to Aunt Jane. I was glad to have some exciting news to tell her,—delighted to be able to give her and Lady Arabella something shocking and unexpected to talk about. Of late I had seen unmistakable signs that my aunts were growing tired of each other's spiritual refreshment, and I feared they had intermarried the whole world into hopeless confusion.

We had more than arrived at the time of year when Lady Arabella came up to town and gave her annual charity concert. She had delayed taking a house later than usual this year, and I was sure she had done so for David's sake, because she knew Aunt Jane would tease David, and she feared he might be driven away from me again. I was deeply grateful to dear Lady Arabella for her tact and kindness; and I only hoped she would keep Aunt Jane away a little longer.

I trembled at the mere thought of Aunt Jane's arrival. Even supposing she would consent to sleep in her own damp house, I knew she would live in mine. I had a horror of her appearing on the scene amidst Mrs Clownton and Mr Verrard, and Louisa and David. I did not know what idea might not strike

her. I only knew she would say exactly what she ought not to, and drive David mad !

I also thought if Aunt Jane could stay away just a little longer, that Mrs Clownton might perhaps have grown tired of our acquaintance. I knew she was a lady who took up people and places by fits and starts ; so if she took you up to-day, you had a good chance of being dropped to-morrow. She had the reputation of constantly changing everybody, even her gentleman-in-waiting. I had heard Lady de Gguylatthe say that Mrs Clownton had kept Mr Verrard longer in her service "than any other footman." This was strange, for a less assiduous attendant I never saw in my life. He was really too lazy to attend on any one. His flirtation (if it could be called such) was passive, not active ; he let Mrs Clownton flirt with him, that was all ! He let her hint she would like a bracelet or a dress, and he gave it to her. Under other circumstances, it was not unlikely he would have allowed Louisa Clarke to do the same. I could understand how Lady Clarke, believing in Mrs Clownton's obligations towards herself, should think Mr Verrard must be a certain "catch."

Mrs Clownton was slipping into the habit of coming constantly at odd hours to my house : she would say, "My dear Mrs Scott, you see I come quite without ceremony." She invariably brought Louisa Clarke and Mr Verrard. They also came quite without ceremony, and entirely without apology.

I much disliked Mr Verrard coming continually to my house with Mrs Clownton, but so accustomed was he to be taken everywhere by this lady that he never perceived my annoyance. His coolness was unabashed, and he twirled the end of his dark moustache over one corner of his under lip, catching the longer hairs every now and then with the tip of his tongue. Nothing seemed to put him out : he was quite content with being a rich man who had first-rate shooting, who was decidedly handsome, and undoubtedly six feet three in his stockings. He is handsome, he is six feet three, and he has a very large fortune, and there is nothing more to be said about him ! He gives you the impression of being handsome and over six feet, and makes no other on your mind. He has no conversation himself, but he has the one virtue of never expecting any one to talk to him. I should often have forgotten his existence if Mrs Clownton had not been constantly appealing to "Master Jim,"—her "little boy," as she called him. In reply, he did little more than catch the longer hairs of his moustache upon his lower lip ; yet this answer, if it could be called one, was enough to provoke

a flow of the liveliest banter from the lady's ready lips. I never heard a more incessant talker than Mrs Augustus Clownton. In her presence you forgot the silence of other people: she was a sort of talking population in herself, and could cover the silence of many dummies. She had a way of addressing first one person, then another, then every one at once, which gave you the idea some one must be talking besides herself. It was only when you tried to speak, that you discovered your mistake.

The constant clatter of her everlasting banter irritated me. I thought her "chaff" and allusions in very bad taste. I was angry with David for not hating them as I did.

She took it for granted I was to be jealous of every word David might speak to Louisa, and of every little attention he might pay her. This was a standard subject of chaffing allusion. She would exclaim—"Take care, Louisa! now, really, I do advise you to be prudent! Let Mrs Scott put the sugar in her own husband's tea." And she would say ridiculous things like this, as if there were a fund of understood meaning and wit in the remark. Louisa would look languidly pleased, and laugh. David would laugh too. I would feel very hot and uncomfortable, and David would be piqued to show how ridiculous he thought me. When Mrs Clownton was by, David was almost ashamed to speak to me; if he did speak, she made a joke of it, and rallied him about it, and called him my model husband. She had the knack of separating us entirely in her presence. I do not exactly know how she did it. I only felt she had this art.

Though Mrs Clownton secretly made my life a burden to me, her subtle cruelty was invisible. No one but I seemed to see she was my enemy. She was a versatile actress both on the stage and off it; and little by little, not too suddenly at first, she took to playing the part of my ardent admirer—my quite too more than dearest of friends. Her flattery became overpowering. She puzzled me. I could not understand why she went to the trouble of paying me so many compliments, for a very great trouble it is, as I have so little that is attractive or susceptible of flattery about me. Her compliments made me feel very awkward.

Mrs Clownton was perfectly at home in my house. If I went out in the afternoon, I would find her presiding at my tea-table on my return. One day, just about five o'clock, she rushed into my drawing-room, clasping her hands together in a theatrical manner, and exclaiming—"My dear Mrs Scott! my

dear Mrs Scott ! I am in a state of positive, perfect despair—now, really, I am ! but what can I do ? what can I do ? The Duchess of Wildfire says I positively must teach her her part this very afternoon, and she is going to act it to-night with Jim Verrard, and she says I must coach them both ! and I wanted so to refuse, for I am positively worn out ! but the duchess would not let me, and Mrs Sherbrook-Stewart told me I really must not refuse the duchess, as the duchess never, never would forgive me ; and I am in perfect, perfect despair ! for I did think I should have such a quiet afternoon, and that I would ask you to give me a cup of tea, and that we should all be so comfortable together.” And Mrs Clownton laughed merrily. It is the fashion in Mrs Clownton’s “set” to be very merry and laugh at everything and nothing. “And now do forgive me, do forgive me, my dear Mrs Scott ! for I must just leave Louisa here. I cannot take her to the duchess’s rehearsal, but I shall be back in no time ! no time ! But now, really, I must be off ! Master Jim ! call the carriage ! Oh, you naughty, naughty boy ! do be quick !”

Mrs Augustus Clownton stood in the doorway kissing hands to us and saying, “Day day !” Bye bye !” like an infant in the first stage of innocent skittishness. She was always wonderfully youthful in voice and manner, and she tied in her dress and made herself as tight and small as possible. She affected a fairy-airy sort of demeanour. “Day day ! Bye bye !” and off she went, taking her “naughty boy” with her ; but she was back again in no time. She came running into the room as quickly as her very high heels would let her : patter, patter, patter ; up she ran to Louisa and whispered—if that could be called a whisper which we all could hear—“Don’t make Mrs Scott too jealous, my dear. I warn you ! I warn you !” And off she ran again ; patter, patter, patter, “Bye bye !” and she was gone !

Mrs Clownton’s was a stage aside, purposely intended for the public ear ; yet being avowedly a whisper, it had this great advantage over an ordinary remark, that you were not bound to have heard it unless you wished. I liked to appear deaf. Yet Mrs Clownton’s words were not lost upon me ; I understood and resented them. They pleased Louisa. She smiled, and spoke to David in that tone of peculiar softness her voice can take at will ; it is a tone which annoys me as if it were a rasp. Dropping her eyelids and looking consciously lovely, she inurmured, “I am very courageous ; am not I ?”

To her surprise, David gave no answer. He looked pain-

fully uncomfortable. His silence, instead of offending Louisa, excited her. I had only once before seen her really excited ; it was that time at Mineham. No one who has not seen, can imagine how excitement increases her soulless beauty. Her colour brightened. Her eyes awoke. Her face lighted with expression. My heart quailed to think how David must feel the power of her awakened beauty.

David's awkwardness soon passed off, and he appeared only too well pleased to look at Louisa and talk to her. He grew eager and eloquent. I alone was awkward. I was in pain and misery. I can taste the bitterness of that hour still by thinking of it, so keenly did I feel it.

Louisa seemed to see my wretchedness, yet only flirted the more with David. I had not thought she was clever enough to flirt so well ; but I fear it takes but little talent for one woman to make another's misery.

It was a long time, I thought, before Louisa went away, and when she did go, David escorted her home, as Mrs Clownton had not returned to fetch her.

This was only the first of several times that Mrs Augustus Clownton dropped Louisa at my house. Though she always was in positive, perfect despair, and always had some excellent excuse for doing so, I saw symptoms on Mrs Clownton's part of a wish to get rid of Louisa's constant presence. Why or wherefore I do not pretend to know. Perhaps Mr Verrard began to admire Louisa's beauty. I cannot say if this were so ; I merely saw pretty clearly, that Mrs Clownton considered two were company but three were none ; now positively none !

Sometimes Mrs Clownton would only leave Louisa for half-an-hour, sometimes for an hour, sometimes for more.

One afternoon I was obliged to go out. On my return I was surprised to find David in the house, and alone. When I entered the drawing-room he seemed unaware of my presence. He sat absorbed in his own thoughts. I touched him on the shoulder. He started on seeing me, and immediately exclaimed : "Sophy, Fred Tankney has run off with Lady Offaway !"

"Who told you so, David ?"

"Louisa."

"Louisa ? Was she here ? Where is she ?" I inquired.

"She is gone," he said ; "she told me and went away."

"Why did she go away ?"

David sprang to his feet—"Do you think she is a stick or a stone," he asked fiercely, "that nothing should move her ?"

"But she never cared for Fred Tankney," said I.

"She hated him!" cried David, impetuously; "all along she has only cared for . . . for me! But that fellow thrust himself between us."

"David," I said, and the calmness of my own voice startled me,—it was as if I had heard some one else speak unexpectedly; "David, did she tell you that she only cared for you?"

"The secret fell from her unawares!" he said.

"It was wicked of her to tell you, David."

David faced me. He was pale with passion. "It was wicked," he said, slowly; "for it is too late! I am married now."

There was a moment's intense silence.

"David, David," I said, "would to God it were not I that stood between you and her, since you love her. Oh, my God! my God! would it were any one on earth but I!"

David only turned on his heel and left me, and went out of the house.

My heart had broken at his words.

It was late at night when David came home: sleep, or the wish to rest, had not yet come to me, and so we met again before the words David had spoken were grown cold with time. We met in silence. It was a silence, I think, each of us would fain have broken if we could; but we could not. We met as two people meet speechless at an open grave where sorrow and remorse, unclosed as yet, lie for both of them.

We met with the last illusion quite, quite dead between us.

THE END.

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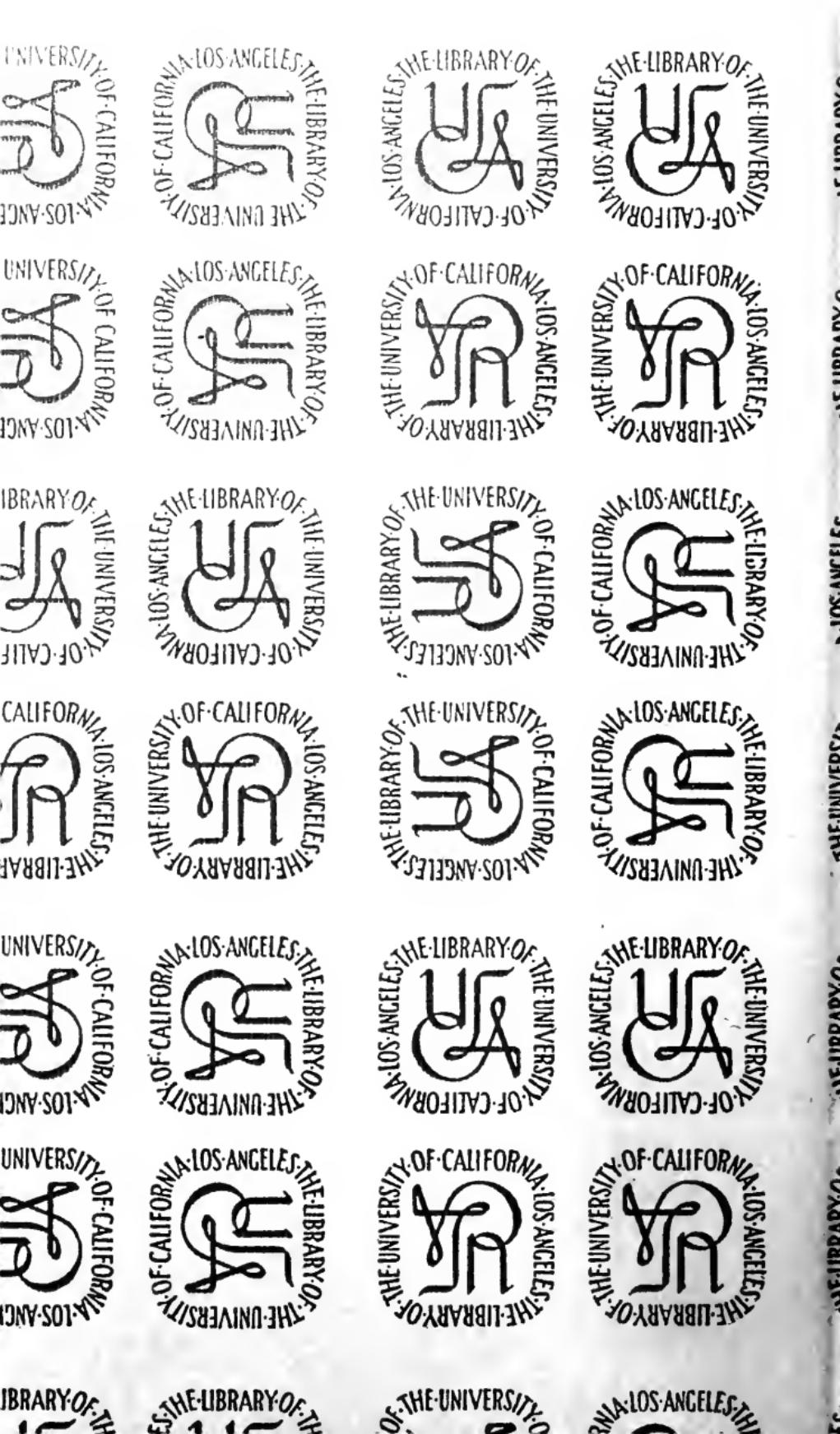
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